

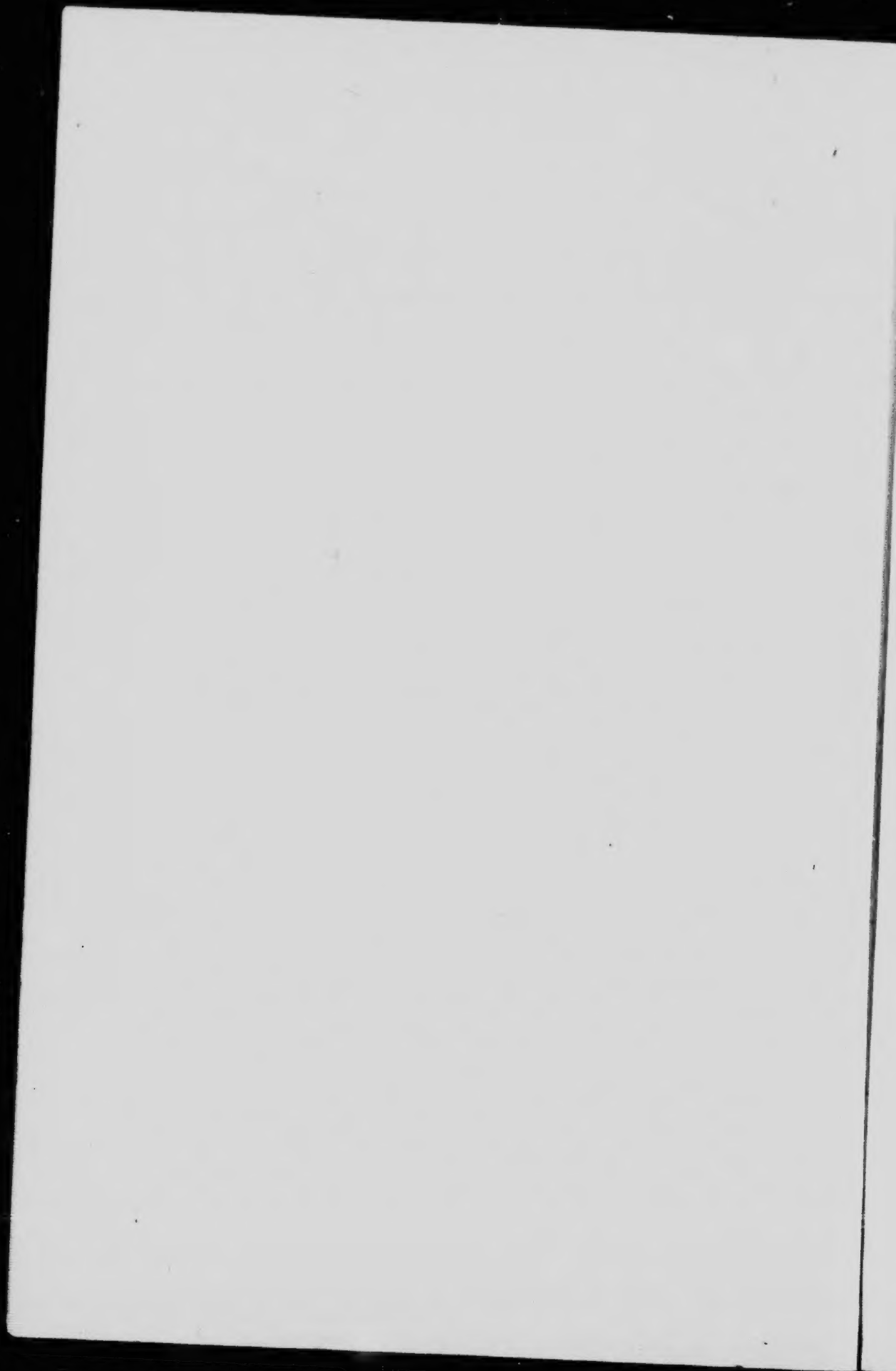
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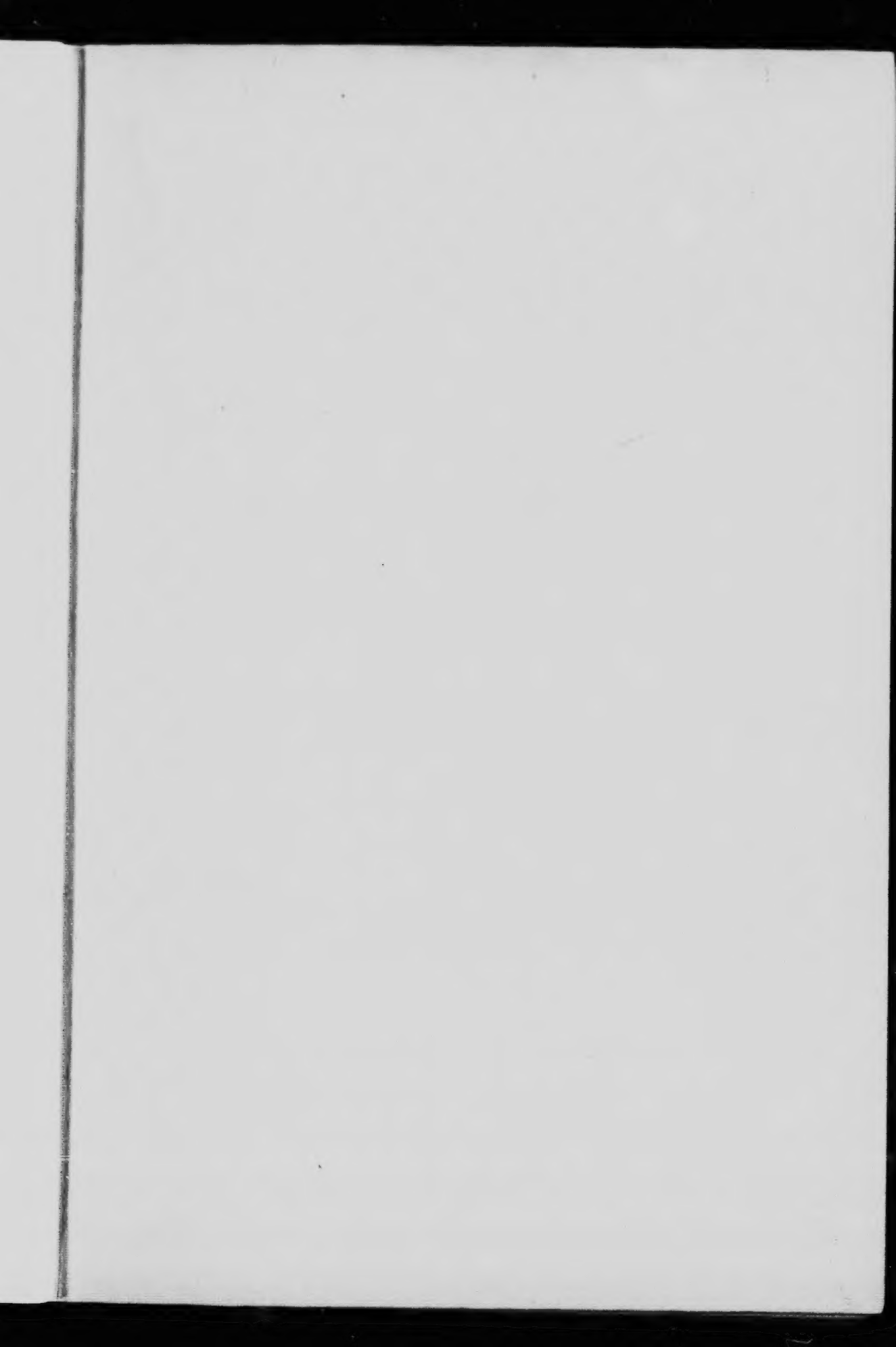
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GLEAM O' DAWN







“‘I love you, li'l brown girl.’”

[Page 168.]

GLEAM O' DAWN

A NOVEL

By

ARTHUR GOODRICH

Author of "The Balance of Power"

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**TO THE
LITTLE BROWN GIRL**

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"I feel two natures struggling within me."

CHARACTERS

DANIEL HUNTWORTH.

MR. THOMAS.

YOUNG THOMAS.

DAN SMITH.

PÈRE BAPTISTE.

PIERRE.

FRANÇOIS.

FRANCHETTE.

NINI.

GLEAM O' DAWN

CHAPTER I

HOOF BEATS

"Avree wan dat knew her felt de jantil pow'r
Av Rosalie, de prayree flow'r."

THE low guttural voice was stifled almost to a whisper. The half-formed words became a mumbled chant, and mingled with the silence.

The first gleam of the dawning sun slanted across the hilltop. It sifted warmly through the evergreens on the edge of the clearing. It turned to a somber gray the eastern edge of the rambling house. It reached the solitary, motionless figure. It lightened the stolid, bronze face, that stared vacantly at the glowing horizon. With its touch came a sudden transformation. The figure relaxed and became a man. The chant stopped sharply in a choking sigh. Across the dull, hard

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face a weird, mystical something that might have been a smile stole, wavered and disappeared. Cunning came in its place. The man looked about him stealthily. Then he threw himself flat upon the ground before the glory of the eastern sky.

Two or three moments passed, and still he lay motionless. Across, in one of the outbuildings, a horse pawed nervously. Like a flash the man was on his feet, alert, dissembling. He listened, and again he looked warily about him. Finding nothing, he moved forward a few steps, a strange mixture of dignity and stealth in his gait. Before him stretched a slow incline of unkempt pasture land, divided by a winding, narrow roadway. It was bordered by dense forest, and ended on the shore of a lake that was a cool blue now in the shadow. Behind him lay the silent house, with its cluster of outbuildings, strong, rough, nondescript, an outward sign of the meeting of frontier and civilization. About and beyond it were the thick woods, stirring with life now that the hush of the dawn was passed. But the man heard nothing of it, saw nothing of it. His face was toward the east.

HOOF BEATS

"Gleam o' Dawn," he whispered. "Gleam o' Dawn."

A door opened noiselessly in one of the small buildings clustered at the rear of the house, and a woman and a girl slipped forth. The woman's finger covered her mouth in a warning sign as she caught sight of the man, and together the two hurried silently toward him. They were a study in contrasts. The woman was short but huge, a bulging almost uncouth figure, broad of shoulders and big of hips. She moved forward now with a jerky roll in her effort for silence. Her heavy jaw and her thin, decisive lips were like a man's and she had keen, frank eyes, and cheeks as broad and as brown as the flat of her forearm, from which the red checkered sleeve was rolled back on a massive arm. The girl was slender, lithe, clean-limbed, springing, it seemed, toward Heaven with every step. The bronze of her hair and of her eyes gave off soft lights to the sun, and her full lips, parted in a smile, were lifted caressingly to the air. Where the brown of her dress gaped at the neck, the softer brown of her throat quivered with her re-

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pressed breathing, and her long, tapering fingers beat time with her steps in sheer abandon.

They had scarcely reached the front of the house when, although they had seemed to make no sound, the man turned suddenly and faced them, his arms folded. The woman stopped, but the girl skipped artlessly forward.

"What-you-want?" he growled, eyeing the woman with a wrinkled frown.

She stood for a moment, her arms akimbo, meeting his glance, then —

"Nini," she called.

The girl stopped half way between them. The woman folded her arms and threw her head back in mocking derision.

"What you want?" she asked hoarsely, glowering at the girl.

Nini laughed — bubbling, delicious, infectious laughter. She whirled gaily nearer to the silent figure. Directly in front of him she folded her arms with a magnificent gesture.

"Pierre," she demanded, haughty by supreme effort. "What you want?"

Then came again the musical, thrilling laughter,

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the laughter of high spirits at play. And its note was so gentle and so free from any trace of antagonism, that even Pierre's stolid face relaxed. The woman joined with noisy, burly merriment.

"A wonderful morning, eh, Pierre?" The girl's mood changed quickly as she gazed down over the glowing valley. Pierre half turned, but the woman interrupted roughly.

"*Mais oui*," she declared. "The morning, it is very beautiful. But that matters not to me. Every morning he is here, the same place, the same time, always. Does the noble man say his beads, or does he think the trouble that is in his ugly face, or maybe he is — in love." She laughed scornfully.

The man called Pierre stared at her stolidly. His broad shoulders were slightly bent. His straight, black hair was streaked with gray, but there was a sense of strong vitality about him. His face was ugly, as the woman had said — leathery, copper-colored, with big, protruding bones, and with deep furrows in the brow, at the eyes, at the mouth — but the reflection of the dawn had left a strange, mystical light in his glowing eyes, in

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startling contrast to the sluggishness of his features.

The girl looked up at him questioningly.

"What do you do, Pierre?" she asked.

The man grunted.

"I do nothing," he said shortly.

"Nothing! Nothing! That is it," railed the woman. "Always he does nothing. He is an Indian. What would you? They are all alike. Does nothing. Always nothing," she repeated muttering to herself. "Nothing, nothing, nothing."

At the word "Indian," the man's face was suddenly contorted and malignant.

"You-not know-the Indian."

"Not know the Indian?" retorted the woman. "Was I not at St. Pierre for two years? Have I not known an Indian girl until she was like my own sister? I know the Indian man. He does nothing, always nothing; nothing, nothing, nothing."

Pierre's face was set grimly.

"He hates," he said, harshly. "What-you-want?"

HOOF BEATS

"Want?" cried the woman, imitating his tone.
"Want? What is it that I want? I want the wood, the wood for the fire. *Vite! Vite!*"

"I-not-get-wood." Pierre waited a moment. Then he turned and stalked with deliberate dignity past her, toward the house. It was an old struggle, but Nini heard it for the first time.

"I'll get the wood, Franchette," she called.
"Tell me where to go and —"

Pierre halted.

"No."

"Oh, yes," the girl said eagerly. "I'd like to do it. I —"

"No." Pierre shook his head. "I get wood."

Franchette watched him until he was out of sight behind the buildings in the rear. Then she sighed noisily, a sigh that shook her broad bulk.

"*Voilà*," she remarked half to herself. "Have I not always said that some time he will get wood for me?"

The girl also watched the retreating figure. She smiled.

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"That was very good of Pierre," she said thoughtfully. "He has a kind heart."

"Kind heart! Bah!" rejoined Franchette with angry vigor. "There is no kindness in him. He is Indian. Indian blood is bad." She nodded her head to emphasize each phrase. Then she added briskly: "But why do I talk? M'sieu says I talk too much. He is right. Franchette of the loose tongue, that is my name. It is time to work. Come, Nini, there is the water to bring, and — Oh, I talk too much, I talk too much, I talk too much," she grumbled.

Nini followed her loiteringly. Within the roomy kitchen she found Franchette already busy. With the empty pail in her hand, she paused at the door.

"I like to hear you talk, Franchette," she remarked. "You say much that is good, much that is true and — much that is foolish. I like it."

"Foolish, yes!" muttered Franchette, without looking up. "Foolish, foolish, always foolish."

Nini felt the spring of the earth under her soft moccasins, and danced merrily across the clearing to where the little tangled path wound its way into

HOOF BEATS

the heart of the woods. What a good, queer, kind soul Franchette was, and how bright the sun was, and how sweet the odor of the morning air! At the first bend of the path she stopped short, and took a deep breath. Slowly, like a child, she turned her head to make sure that the clearing was no longer in sight. The delicious sense of aloneness tingled in her. She had always been like that in the woods, ever since M'sieu had brought her there three summers before. Her ear grew keener. She heard every flutter in the myriad leaves overhead. She caught every note of a bird's low call to its mate. In the distance she heard the murmur of the brook below the spring, and now, as always, there came, echoing back to her from a dim, faraway childhood, the flutter of other leaves, the call of other birds, the dull murmur of other brooks. She stole along on tiptoe, holding her breath, the coarse brown of her dress and the bronze of her hair blending with the dull coats of the trees. It seemed that the woods did not notice her, and she listened to their secrets.

At last she reached the spring. A group of

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sentinel oaks marked its bubbling cup. In the cool shade she lay down on the soft earth and drank, plunging her face playfully beneath the surface. Then she drew back, shaking the drops of water from her face, blinking about her cautiously. She always had a primitive sense of discovery, of adventure, when she was at the spring alone. She liked to imagine that some morning some one would find her there. She did not wish it. She had never believed it really possible. But the thought of it thrilled her. And that morning it reminded her of something else. She sat very still for a moment or two, and gazed vacantly at the gnarled tree-trunk that bent shelteringly over the spring. Then she arose, filled her pail and hurried back along the path, the weight dragging at her arm, limiting her sense of freedom.

As she reached the edge of the clearing, Pierre appeared at the kitchen door. Franchette followed him, and stood in the doorway ponderously.

"And now," she said, "bring M'sieu's horse. He will wish it."

The Indian's mouth broke in an ugly sneer, as he glanced up at the house. A twig snapped

HOOF BEATS

under Nini's foot, and he wheeled, stiffeningly erect, his face expressionless as he caught sight of her.

"I-get-wood," he said, with a proud wave of his hand toward the kitchen. Then he turned gravely and left them.

"Thank you, Pierre," called the girl, but he gave no sign of hearing her.

Nini followed Franchette into the kitchen and put down the heavy pail.

"Franchette," she said hesitatingly. "I have something to tell you."

Franchette eyed her with frank curiosity, poking the fire mechanically. Nini backed to the open door, and leaned against it, beating a nervous tattoo on the wood with her fingers. Franchette's attention to the fire grew more intermittent and finally ceased. She came forward.

"Well?" she inquired.

"Franchette," Nini spoke in an awed voice that was almost a whisper. "Last night I had a dream."

"*Oui, oui*, a dream," repeated the woman eagerly.

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"It was a strange dream." Nini hesitated again. "I was standing out there, and the sun was very high. I seemed to be all alone. I was listening, listening for something, I knew not what. But my heart was beating very hard, Franchette. I was not frightened. I do not know why my heart was beating so."

The girl stared past the door at the checkered light on the ground at the edge of the forest. Franchette waited, her curiosity delayed by superstitious awe.

"And then?" she suggested at last.

"And then," Nini went on, still watching the changing lights outside, "I heard the sound of hoof beats, and my heart beat so I could scarcely breathe. And then a man, riding a great bay horse, came in sight up the roadway — a strange man."

"A strange man — here?" said Franchette. "And his face?"

Nini did not answer for a moment.

"That was it," she continued at last. "I could not see his face. He held his face away from me. He was tall. He was graceful. He sat his horse

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well. That was all I could see. I tried to call to him, but I was stifled. Everything turned red. I seemed to see M'sieu's face and Pierre's, and then I awoke. I was trembling, Franchette."

Franchette nodded solemnly.

"And Franchette," Nini went on hesitatingly, "I can't tell why, but I knelt down beside my bed and I prayed, Franchette, prayed that I might see the face of that man."

Franchette raised her hand mechanically to her heart, and her jaw dropped with wonder.

"You prayed to the good God?"

"I prayed to the good God," said Nini, returning her look fearlessly. "I cannot tell why, but it was right."

"You prayed to the good God? — A strange man?" — Franchette stopped and listened. A heavy footstep was heard outside.

"M'sieu," whispered Franchette, hurrying frantically to her blazing fire. The girl did not move. She stood beating the tattoo on the door with her fingers. A stalwart figure cast its shadow across the threshold.

"*Bon jour*, Franchette. Good morning, Nini."

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The voice was deep and strong, but quiet. The figure of the man suggested repose and dignity, but one could scarcely have told whether it was the dignity that nature gives, or a dignity that comes with the weight of years and weariness. His face was good to look upon, the strong, set chin, the clean-cut nose, the broad brow with its crown of iron-gray hair; but there was a tired droop about the mouth. His blue eyes were very gentle as he glanced up at Nini. He had the look of a man whose soul had demanded much of him and had not been satisfied.

"Where is Pierre? Ah, here he comes now." The voice remained at the same quiet level. He stood in aloof repose, waiting for the Indian, who came up, holding with difficulty a big, restive gray horse.

"Pierre, I saw a light in the cabin by the lake last night. I am sure there was a light. Go over there now, and find out who it is. I don't wish neighbors."

He swung himself into the saddle.

"Breakfast in an hour, Franchette," he called. The gray rushed off down the slope at a gallop,

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and was quickly out of sight. Franchette had come to the door.

"He is a very handsome man — M'sieu," she remarked with a sigh.

Nini did not hear her. She was watching Pierre, whose eyes, like two cutting points of sharp steel, were glowering along the road the horse had taken. He was mumbling to himself, and a scowl twisted his face malevolently.

"Pierre, why do you look like that?" she asked in a half whisper. "You look as if you almost — hated M'sieu."

At the touch of her hand on his arm, a crafty smile replaced the scowl. He shrugged his shoulders.

"M'sieu speak," he said. "I go."

And, as if to prove his loyalty, he stalked deliberately down the road, his head bent, following the marks of the mare's hoofs.

Mr. Huntworth pulled in the gray as he came to the edge of the lake. The horse danced excitedly under the rein. The woods were new to her. Even the ripple of the water on the hard, pebbly beach startled her. He guided her with

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difficulty away from the road, which led along the left shore, and up an unused trail to the right. Years before, when the log cabin on the southern shore was occupied, this trail had been clear and open, but now it was so overgrown that it was scarcely visible. A short way from the turn, Huntworth, riding around a deep, washed-out gully, reached a stretch of bare ground. He stooped over and examined the earth. A moment later he halted abruptly. There were deep marks of hoofs, new marks. He looked back, and his forehead creased with astonishment. The marks were those of a horse landing from a leap. He measured with his eye the distance to the gully. It was the leap of a wild horse. He rode back around the gully, and looked from the vantage point above toward the hoof marks beyond. The horse must have been running mad to have made such a leap. No man could have chosen it. It seemed as if no man could have held his seat.

He returned to where the trail met the roadway, and followed the road along the north shore, still marveling. A bird hopped among the leaves, and the gray shied nervously. For some time they

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loped along, the primeval forest at their left, and at their right the ruffled blue of the lake, shimmering through intervening trees. Soon the road wound to the water's edge again, and Huntworth moodily looked up and across, searching the opposite bank. At last he came to a place from which he could see the quiet cove, hidden before by a ragged promontory. He saw the little cabin squatted in the midst of dense woodland. He shaded his eyes to see more clearly. Then he reined in the mare with a muttered exclamation. From the cove a tiny rift of smoke, as of a dying fire, rose thin but steady — white against the leaves, a wan gray against the sky. He loosened the rein and rode forward, annoyed and troubled.

Before him the eastern edge of the lake rose precipitously in a gray cliff, that extended a short quarter mile before it sheered off again to the low wooded shore. This was his usual morning ride, down along the shore, up a narrow path he had made to the bluff, bare now of high timber; there to rest alone for a time, gazing back across the quiet waters toward his distant haven on the far

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away hillside. No one ever came with him. He was always alone, a solitary figure in a desolate land.

A mile farther on he left the blue sheen of the lake behind him, and soon he pulled the horse to the right into the narrow path. The mare obeyed the rein restively, and picked her way carefully through the upland woods, pricking her ears at every sound. Huntworth patted her neck and spoke to her soothingly. As they rose higher, the trees thinned gradually in long vistas, through which came glimmering visions of the opening beyond. In the hush he could hear the gray's low intake of breath.

Suddenly he leaped in his saddle. Across the stillness rang a piercing shout that grew into a wild yell, shrill, unceasing, echoing, echoing, echoing. There came a rush of sound, and a brown blur dashed toward them through the shadows. The gray bolted straight at the lighter spaces ahead. Huntworth settled firmly in the saddle and crouched low, dodging the limbs that bent down across their path. A tree trunk caught at his leg and nearly twisted him from the gray's

HOOF BEATS

back, but he hung on desperately, calling breathlessly to the horse. The shouting behind him had ceased as abruptly as it had begun.

Out into the open wheeled the frightened gray, plunging wildly through the tangled grass, slipping, tripping, quivering, frantic with fear. Huntworth lay back, pulling steadily, uselessly, for the mare had the strength of madness. On and on they rushed, now dodging with a whirl that almost threw him, the scarred stumps which the lumbermen had left — gravestones of a once beautiful forest; now jumping them; now stumbling over holes that might have caught the wary; but always on, on, on, toward the place where the gray green of the land seemed to meet the blue of the sky. Huntworth's face was set as he saw that line of gray ahead, coming nearer with every bounding leap of the crazy mare. In vain he tugged at the rein. In vain he whispered, commanded, cajoled. Always the edge of the cliff came nearer, nearer, nearer. A vague terror, a feeling of unreality, of powerlessness came over him, and he knew it was the sense of death.

He heard the beat of the gray mare's hoofs on

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the harder ground. His arms were strained and numb. Then he thought he heard the beat of other hoofs than hers close behind him, and the mare heard them, too, for she lifted herself for a final frenzied effort. Then a distended brown nose, hissing with breath, crept up at his elbow. Huntworth saw, with acute vision, the farther blue of the waters, the long, sloping shore in the dim distance, and, in the green beyond, the dun spot that marked his home. The horses were almost neck and neck, and their hoof-beats clattered harshly on the rock. Huntworth closed his eyes dizzily, and threw every ounce of his waning strength upon the rein. It was without avail, and he freed himself to jump, when the mare slowed and stopped short, shuddering.

Half dazed at deliverance, Huntworth opened his eyes. Almost at his feet the gray cliff sheered off rapidly to a perpendicular, and below, the water, dull in the shadow, lapped sullenly against its base. He looked away quickly. A riderless bay horse stood panting at his right, so near to him that he might have stroked the sweating neck.

"Ver' close." The voice, instinct with vigor,

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came from the left of the mare's head, and Huntworth turned to look upon perhaps the most striking figure of a man he had ever seen. The stranger was tall, erect, with a lithe body under broad, square shoulders. The cleanly chiseled face, with rich olive skin, was large-featured and strong, but refined by a sensitiveness of mouth and of nostril. Straight, silken black hair was crowded back from a high forehead. A red handkerchief was knotted carelessly about a curving, muscular neck, and, just above its folds at the left, there was a short, dull red scar. Below were a faded blue shirt, sleeves uprolled, and worn corduroy trousers. The blue eyes that looked up into Huntworth's were laughing through their seriousness, and the corners of the mouth were twitching with a frank smile. Huntworth responsively smiled, a smile that was perhaps thirty years old and had just come back to him. He slid from the gray's back and grasped the stranger's hand in a hard grip.

"Bah! I mak you to go. I mus' mak you to stop." The tone was deprecating, boyish, friendly.

"It is a gret beeg jump, *n'est ce pas?*" He waved his hand toward the lake below.

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"I thought we should make it," said Huntworth soberly.

"Never," was the buoyant answer. "The Win', he surely stop you."

Huntworth was puzzled.

"The Wind?"

The stranger laughed.

"The Win' is the name of my horse," he explained.

Huntworth nodded and patted the mare. Something within him rose to meet the confident, merry youthfulness of the man, and he shrunk from it with inward embarrassment. Then he noticed that blood was dripping from the gray's nostrils, and he glanced questioningly at the stranger. The man returned the look with an inscrutable smile.

"I think I'll go back," Huntworth said after a moment.

"I go with you," was the quick response, and the stranger vaulted upon the back of the big bay, whirling him about deftly on the edge of the rock. They let the horses walk at first.

"See," cried the younger man. "The horse of M'sieu is ver' tire'. The Win' is not tire'.

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The Win' is never tire'." He stroked the arching bay neck proudly.

Huntworth did not answer.

"What were you shouting at?" he asked at last.

The stranger burst into boisterous laughter, and again, subdued now and restrained, he echoed the shout that had started them on that mad race. The gray mare pricked her ears and halted hesitatingly.

"I shout at the morning," he cried, his straight, white teeth showing in a smile. "I hear the dawn calling to me, an' the gleam of it is across my way." Mr. Huntworth looked up, and the smile on the man's face was very soft and tender. "The Win' is under me, M'sieu, an' the sky above me, an' whiss — away an' away an' away. An' I cry loud. I can not stop, M'sieu. That is all."

Again something within Huntworth went out to the stranger, something that he had not known was there, something that he could not control.

"What's your name?" he asked, with more interest than he had felt in years.

"My name, Dan Smith," was the simple reply.

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They came to the path through the woods. Huntworth remembered his bruised leg for the first time, and reached down to feel it carefully.

"Where do you live, Smith?" he asked.

Again the boyish smile answered him.

"I live where I am," laughed the stranger. "It is a beeg worl'."

"But what are you doing here?" Huntworth was secretly wondering at his own curiosity.

"I am at Keelen', that is six mile." The stranger was almost childishly frank and ready.

"I ride out to see the color of the tree, of the water, of the sky; the color, M'sieu, an' the light.

That is yesterday." Huntworth nodded. "I fin' li'l' house. The door is open. I go in. I lak it an' I rest there. It is where I live to-day, p'raps to-morrow, p'raps nex' day. I not know. What does it matter?"

They slipped down the path to the beaten roadway. Breaking into an easy trot, they were soon at the lakeside.

"Suppose," said Huntworth, "the man that owns the cabin, where you live, should come and tell you to go."

HOOF BEATS

The man shrugged his shoulders irrepressibly.

"I smile at him if he is sad, poor man, an' I laugh with him if he is gay. Then I call to The Win', an' I say *Adieu*, an' I paint some other place, you see? It is a beeg worl'."

Huntworth looked up with a flash of new interest.

"You paint?"

"Yes," said the other naïvely. "I see much. Then, some day, I feel much here," — his free hand over his heart — "an' here," — his fingers on his temple — "an' here," — he touched the tips of the fingers that held the rein — "an' then I paint that which I feel."

Huntworth half smiled as he nodded approvingly.

"I used to do that," he said, and the gloom settled upon him again. "I painted once."

"You paint, *once*, M'sieu!" The stranger looked at Huntworth in frank wonder. "How you stop?"

Huntworth was mute for some moments.

"I forgot how to feel, I think," he said at last. "I only saw."

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The stranger shifted uneasily.

"*Eh bien*," he remarked after a time, filling his lungs deeply. "It is a wonderful worl'."

Huntworth turned up the hillside road, and beckoned the stranger to follow. He touched the mare with the whip and she broke into a gallop.

"It is not sage to use the whip, M'sieu," called the stranger. "It mak the horse's laig say yes, but it mak his heart say no."

The big bay came bounding after her, gaining with every stride. The hoof beats echoed on the gravel. Soon the bay forged ahead, and vanished above the knoll, a few lengths in the lead.

Pierre had just returned.

"Paint — pretty color — woman-man," he said sneeringly, in answer to Franchette's questions. The three were near the kitchen door. Suddenly an expectant look lit up Nini's face. She inclined her head to listen. Then she put a hand on Franchette's arm.

"Hoof beats," she whispered. "A horse is coming."

Pierre was listening also.

"Two horses," he said, holding up two fingers.

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He moved forward, followed by Franchette, but Nini remained, crouched back, staring at the road.

The big bay horse came to a standstill just above the knoll. A second or two later Mr. Huntworth pulled in the gray mare beside him.

"This is my house. My name is Huntworth," he said quietly to the stranger. "I shall be glad if you will come and see me. I own the cabin, where you live. I hope you will stay."

The stranger looked at him and smiled. Then he held out his hand.

"I lak you," he said impulsively.

Pierre came up and Mr. Huntworth dismounted. The Indian, leading the mare past the stranger, glanced up. At once the stolid sneer vanished. His eyes caught the narrow scar on the olive neck just above the red handkerchief, and remained there, fixed and glittering. So fierce was the stare indeed that the stranger looked down. Quickly he leaned forward in the saddle.

"You are Indian," he said.

Pierre grunted assent and stalked away, leading the gray mare. The stranger watched him for a moment. Then he turned to Huntworth.

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"*Eh bien, M'sieu,*" he cried, wheeling the big bay. "I go to paint in my beeg studio, whose ceiling is the sky, an' whose wall are all door, an'," he added, with a merry wave of the hand, "they are all open to my frien'."

The big bay horse flashed over the knoll and pounded away down the slope. Almost as he disappeared, two men came from the front door of the house and joined Huntworth.

"A good horseman," remarked the younger man, following the flying figure. "Who is he?"

"His name is Dan Smith," said Huntworth.

Nini was on her knees by the door of the kitchen, and her head was bowed in her hands.

CHAPTER II

"SUNSHINE TO-DAY, RAIN TO-MORROW"

DANIEL HUNTWORTH was an extraordinary man even to those who knew him well; and none knew him more intimately than Mr. Thomas, who, with his son, had come from the house that morning just as Dan Smith galloped away on the big bay horse. Mr. Thomas, gaunt, awkward, unimaginative, had been shrewd enough, when he was a comparatively young man, to see, in the then obscure lumberman, a track to that wealth which was his own sole aim. He had clung tenaciously to Huntworth, fattening himself upon the other's success, and Huntworth, remembering little favors in the early days, tolerated him, recognizing the man's complete selfishness but grateful for the only close association his maturer years had known. In every venture Huntworth had made, good fortune had been at his elbow. Every tract of land he gained turned to gold at his touch. The tumbling trees

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seemed to shout his name as they crashed to the ground on his extending acres, and, far away, men spoke of him with deference. It found no responsive thrill in him, however. Always he was taciturn, old, worn, alone by choice, apparently unsatisfied. "M'sieu is a kind man." Hundreds of men and women had said it and were saying it, but his generosity brought him no warmth, no elation.

That morning's incident, however, aroused him. He talked freely of his ride, of his danger, of the stranger's bravery, relaxing now and then, as if in utter amazement at himself, into his usual reticence. Later, after a word with Franchette, he proposed a walk, and when the three men set out they were accompanied by Pierre, carrying a large basket. Huntworth led them up the unused trail that curved along the right shore of the lake. And the sun was bright on his face as he pointed out to them the long leap that the big bay horse and its rider had made across the washed-out gully. There was a trace of pride as well as of admiration in his voice, as if he were zealously trying to justify his interest in the young stranger. They

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tramped on, single file, bending back, obtruding limbs, stamping through underbrush, climbing over fallen tree trunks. Constantly they encountered fresh hoofmarks, impressive evidence, in that arduous trail, of horse and of horsemanship. They talked of it in varying terms of curiosity and enthusiasm, when they arrived at a spot where the path widened in an open circle, shorn of trees but stubbly underfoot. Truly this was an unusual man, this wanderer of the woods, this painter of pictures, this superb horseman.

The September sun was hot in the open, and the cool of the forest beyond was welcome. And always Pierre stalked behind them, stolid, sardonic. At last they saw fresh green ahead, and soon their feet sank in luxuriant, long grass, sparkling with dew where the shine met the shadow. Yonder, fronting the pebbly beach, was the cabin of plain logs. The black embers of a fire smouldered only a few feet from the entrance, and, near an aged hemlock, they found the marks of restive, pawing hoofs. Passing the corner of the hut they saw that the door was open. Huntworth called, but there was no answer except the reverberating echo.

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Disappointed, he stepped inside. The first signs of habitation were paint tubes, numerous rolls of canvas and crude, improvised stretchers, littered on a board table. A blanket hung from the edge of the bunk. Huntworth fingered the canvas rolls fondly. As his sight became accustomed to the feeble light from the single window, he noticed a rude sketch drying against the wall. A red splash of sunset sky, and the ruddy flush across myriad tree-tops; that was the sum of the picture. Huntworth stood before it for some time, studying it. Mr. Thomas wandered about, bored, supercilious, and his son sat on the bunk, swinging his feet for activity. Finally Huntworth looked about with a gratified smile. As he saw them it disappeared. He spoke to Pierre and walked out, the others following him from force of habit.

Left alone, the Indian rapidly piled the provisions on the floor. Then he crossed swiftly to the window. They were not half way to the forest. His brilliant black eyes glittered. With hasty, stealthy movements he searched among the litter on the table. He pulled away the blanket

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and examined the bunk. Then he groped along the wall, peering into every corner. In the center of the room again he stood frowning, arms folded. With an ugly grunt of defeat he snatched up the empty basket, and marched after the men who were waiting for him at the edge of the woods. Mr. Huntworth was manifestly irritated at the delay.

"I-bring-basket," said Pierre, pointing, impassive, as he came up with them.

A half hour afterward, when they emerged upon the roadway that led up to the house, a slender brown figure stood on the knoll, and tapering fingers shaded eyes which gazed down the road and across the valley. When they came into view, however, the slender brown figure vanished.

All day Nini sang at her work. Franchette watched her furtively. At last she could be quiet no longer.

"The young stranger is an artist, is it not so?" she asked tentatively, with an effort to appear unconcerned.

"That was what Pierre said." Nini went on with her singing, unconscious singing, dreams set loose in melody.

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Franchette scanned her inquisitively.

"The good God he answered your prayer."
Franchette's bluster was subdued by reverence.

"The good God always answers good prayers, Franchette," Nini said simply. Franchette was shamed for a moment.

"It is very strange," she said lamely.

"It does not seem strange to me now," Nini answered, dreamy again.

"Not strange?" retorted Franchette, holding her ground combatively. "But he is a man. Oh, you are a child, a mere child, a mere child."

The girl was frankly puzzled.

"Why, yes, Franchette," she said. "He is a man. What of it? I do not know much of men."

"Oh, you are a child," muttered the woman, baffled, "a child, a mere child."

In the afternoon, Nini set out for the spring once more. Away from the house the impulse drew her again, for a fugitive, half-expectant glimpse of the winding roadway, to the knoll where he had come and from which he had gone. As she neared it an unwonted sound made her steps lag. She listened. From down the hillside came the

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high, scraping notes of a violin. The screaming tune grew louder as it advanced, a crooning, human sound alleviating its shrillness, and over the hilltop came a tiny, wizened man, whose flail-like arm jerked a bow across the strings of an old fiddle, as he limped along.

"*Bon jour, François,*" called Nini.

The shrieking music and the weird crooning ceased for a second. Then they went on more falteringly, as if the fiddler were trying to find a mood that had been broken in upon.

"*Bon jour, François,*" repeated the girl, coming nearer.

The thin, bony hand that held the bow dropped nervelessly at his side. He looked up at her and smiled a dismal smile. The beard on the emaciated face was unkempt and the little, watery eyes wandered.

"*Bon jour,*" he said, in an irresolute, high pitched voice.

"Aren't you lost, François — so far from Keel-end — alone?" she asked.

Elemental fear crept into the fiddler's face.

"Lost. *Non*, not lost." He was trying to

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think. Then a smile shivered pathetically about the weak mouth. "And see," he cried, "I am not alone. I have ma violin. We like to be alone, ma violin and I."

He became incoherent in mumbled gibberish. Then he brightened. He laughed aloud.

"But not to-day," he went on. "To-day in de road we meet a strange man riding. And we hide in de bushes, ma violin and I. And he stop and he call. And den we come out to him, ma violin and I, because we do not dare to disobey. And he make us to play, and den he laugh, and he shout, and he sing with ma violin. 'Good moosic,' he say, and den he take us by de arm, and he lift us high on his horse, and he carry us a long way, and he talk — good talk, Mamselle. And den he stop and we descend to de road, and we play again, and he say 'Good moosic,' and he ride into de wood. Good moosic, eh, ma violin? Good moosic."

The fiddler laughed fitfully, cuddling the violin closer to his scrawny neck.

"Good moosic, ma violin."

"Of course it's good music, François." Nini

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humored him indulgently. "Go to the kitchen, François," she added. "Play for Franchette. She'll have something for you to eat."

"To eat, *oui*." He hobbled along submissively.

"Good moosic," he repeated. "Good moosic."

Nini delayed until she heard Franchette's vociferous greeting. Then she hurried down the path to the spring. This time she did not stop at the turn. She did not hear the songs of the birds or the humming accompaniment of the tree-tops. She sped onward, her thoughts far away with François, poor, foolish François, in the roadway with the stranger on the big, bay horse. And so she came to the sentinel oak trees and the spring, and she smiled, for the spot seemed like an old friend in whom she could confide the new-found, unaccountable, inner experience that stirred and baffled her.

She stretched herself upon the mossy bank, her elbows on the shelving edge, her chin in her hands. She observed vaguely blue and green reflections playing over the undisturbed surface. She heard indistinctly the minstrel brook's lilting melody. Then the fresh girlish face, mirrored in the spring,

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attracted her, and she lay for many moments, her body lax, her mind idle, in drowsy contentment.

Slowly there thrilled through her, inexplicably, the old sense of discovery, more poignant now. She heard nothing, but she felt that some one was near her. She held her breath. Something drew her gaze to the left, and gradually, almost unconsciously, she turned her head. Another face, with merry blue eyes and winsome mouth, and with a red handkerchief about an olive-colored neck, appeared beside hers in the still water. She did not start. She stared at the face, not daring to breathe lest it vanish in a dream. She saw the fine mouth twitch into a boyish smile, and the head bobbed at her sociably. There was open admiration in the look of the eyes, and she glanced back hastily. For the first time in her life Nini realized, with a rush of unknown joy, that the girl's face, with its soft bronze tints, imaged in the spring, was good to see.

"*Bon jour*," said a man's merry voice, moderated instinctively. "I not mak you — afraid?"

She looked across into the blue eyes with frank surprise and innocence.

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"No," she answered readily. "I am not afraid."

In the interval she heard the muffled pawing of a horse among the leaves.

"It is a ver' beautiful place, Mamselle," remarked the voice. She only bowed acquiescence. She felt that she could not speak.

"An' the day," went on the voice, "it is ver' beautiful also, *n'est-ce-pas?* "

Again Nini nodded. There was a rustle beside her, and the man's face disappeared from the mirror of the water. Nini sat up quickly, rudely awakened. The stranger squatted gracefully, abstractedly shredding a long grass.

"Hola," he remarked, smiling to himself. "The place an' the weather. The whole beeg worl' speak of them. Think! If I have all the time all the worl' tak to talk of the place an' the weather, how many wonderful thing I can paint in the eternity I live! An' yet, the worl' is right. The place an' the day, they are much. One thing more, an' one is ver' rich."

Apparently preoccupied, he began to pleat the shreds.

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"And what is the one thing more, M'sieu?" Nini asked.

"A frien'," he said, darting at her a look full of wistful appeal. He threw the pleated grass aside and faced her, leaning back upon his hands.

"See, Mamselle," he went on buoyantly. "A sky that is blue an' bright, so that the heart sing to itself lak it is mad. The place that is green an' cool, where the heart can rest an' listen to its singing. An'," with deeper resonance, "a frien' who is fair an' kîn' an' true, with a heart that sing an' listen also. Ah, Mamselle, that is the bes' of all."

Before the charm of his speech, Nini's life, in retrospect, became long and empty to her.

"Yes," she agreed, "that is the best of all."

He saw her child-like gravity. Immediately he threw back his head and laughed, loud, merry, spontaneous laughter.

"But, Mamselle, we are ver' sober, is it not so?" he declared. "Me, I can not be sober long. When I see you come, I laugh, laugh, laugh in my sleeve, an' I creep up ver' still, so you do not hear, you see? An' all the time I laugh to myself. Then

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I kneel an' I look in the water an' I see your face. An' I stop laughing an' I wish I am back with The Win'." His comical grimace diverted Nini with the utter fun of it.

"Was I so frowning, M'sieu, or was I —"

"No, no, but your face look lak a prayer an' I am sad to interrup'," he said, with perturbed apology. "But now I am glad." He regained his easy composure. "You come from the beeg house of M'sieu Huntworth?"

Nini assented.

"Ah, he is a good man, a kin' man." The stranger spoke enthusiastically. "I lak him."

His fervent tone made Nini beam.

"You are right. He is very kind. He has been kind to me. For three years I have been with him. Before that —" Nini paused. She never had talked about herself and her life to any one, not even to Franchette.

"Before that?" repeated Dan Smith. Everything about him was friendly and kind, inviting trust. Nini went on, exhilarated by a sense of novel liberty.

"Before that I remember only years, long years,

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with Pere Baptiste in the convent at Orlenne on the river. The floods came, and only a few people stayed at Orlenne. We were almost alone. We were very poor. Pere Baptiste was always good to me, but he was much with his books. A time came when we were almost starving. Then M'sieu came to see Pere Baptiste. He talked to me many times, and he brought me away with him. I think he pitied my loneliness, but I was sorry for Pere Baptiste. I had always been with him ever since I can remember. He taught me everything, English, French, everything that I know."

With secret enjoyment Dan Smith watched her features mold themselves to the feelings her story kindled within her. It was like a beautiful flower unfolding itself.

"M'sieu," he mused. "He pity your loneliness?"

"Yes," Nini said. Then she added, from her untaught philosophy: "You see, M'sieu, he himself is lonely. That is why, I think. People pity in others the things they themselves suffer, don't you think so?"

The stranger shrugged his shoulders. He as-

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sumed his old, carefree nonchalance, as he rolled a cigarette.

"I think li'l." There was a flash of white teeth in a quick smile. "Once I think much. My head, it ache. I am ver' sad. An' I stop thinking. I jus' live in the sunlight. When the shadow come, I sleep. That is all."

Concern for him made Nini almost ashamed of talking so much about herself.

"You have worked very hard?" she asked, with gentle solicitude.

"Ah, no." Dan Smith blew thin lines of smoke in fanciful figures about his head. "Ver' li'l' work; too much. Ver' much play; too li'l. Sunshine to-day. Rain to-morrow. Nex' day, forget them both. It is har' to remember. It is easy to hope."

Nini responded to the mood, but she was still unsatisfied.

"But you paint pictures, do you not, M'sieu? You must have studied that. You must have worked very hard."

"No." The stranger shook his head, glimpsing with half shut eyes the wavy rings of smoke.

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"Once I study ver' hard until one day the master say: 'You can never paint. To paint you mus' love an' fight an' hate, an' go to Heaven an' Hell before you are born. You — you are born smoking a cigarette an' laughing in your sleeve.' Then I stop study, an' I jus' paint an' smoke cigarette an' laugh in my sleeve all the time. *C'est tout.*"

Nini yearned to understand what was beneath the flippant words.

"But, M'sieu?" she began.

"*Eh bien,*" he broke in, throwing away the cigarette, and lifting his lithe figure to its full height. "I mus' paint. See, the sun slip away from me. An' The Win' call to me. Listen."

They could hear the big bay stamping below. Nini's eyes were very large and appealing, as she, too, rose to her feet.

"Pardon me, M'sieu," she said. "I ask too many questions. I am only a child, Franchette says. You will forgive me?"

Again the white teeth showed in a kindly smile.

"Franchette?" he asked. "Who is Franchette?"

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"Franchette is another of M'sieu's servants. She is old and wise and very kind."

"Ah, no," he contradicted cynically. "The young are happy an' wise. The ol' are dull an' foolish. But the Indian," he added, with livelier interest. "Who is he?"

"Pierre?" Nini was disconcerted at the question. "M'sieu was good to him also. Pierre was very ragged and worn when he came to M'sieu. That was six months ago. M'sieu has been more silent than ever, since Pierre came. And Pierre — I do not understand Pierre, M'sieu."

"Not understan'? No. He is Indian," he spoke with odd severity. But the morose sternness passed swiftly like a fugitive mood. He put his hands on her shoulders. There was no familiarity in the gesture, only gentle comradeship.

"Mamselle," he began.

"My name is Nini," interrupted the girl.

His friendly smile broadened.

"My name, Dan Smith," he said. For some seconds they stood so, looking into each other's eyes.

"Nini," he went on, "Franchette is right.

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You are a chil', a ver' beautiful chil'. Soon I mus' paint, an' you mus' be of the picture."

"Oh, M'sieu!" she cried, with a happy gasp. He shook his head at her.

"My name, Dan Smith," he said, with warning drollery. "*Au revoir*, Nini."

She watched the tall, graceful figure thread its way among the trees.

"*Au revoir*," she called. Her lips could not frame his name.

She heard him talking to the big bay horse, and afterward the retreating thud of hoofs. Then she remembered. She had been a long time away from the house. Franchette would be needing the water, and wondering where she was. She seized the pail, and filled it quickly, struggling to hurry. As she started to turn away, a square gray something shone in the advancing afternoon light, at the edge of the spring where the stranger had knelt to surprise her. She stooped to pick it up.

It was only a thin, broad piece of wood, discolored with much rubbing and thumbing. But there was something rough on the other side.

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Curious, she turned it. Then she stood motionless, in child-like absorption. She saw, fastened to the wood, a strip of birch bark, yellow with age, upon which were painted in faded colors the head and shoulders of a girl. It was a winsome, gentle face with lips that seemed to tremble in a smile, with straight, black hair, smoothed back from a slightly sloping forehead. Below was a dark-skinned, bare neck circled with beads, and a contrasting many-colored blanket covered the girlish shoulders. But the picture lived in the deep dark eyes, innocent, direct, appealing, barbaric.

Nini reverted to the wooden back once more. In one corner she found some roughly carved letters, which time and use had almost obliterated. Studying closely, she worked out the inscription, letter by letter, tracing in with her finger the fragments of lines that had been lost. When she had finished she looked again at the face of the picture.

"Gleam o' Dawn," she whispered. Her imagination saw a glimmer of the morning light in the dark eyes, and she understood intuitively the dim glory like a halo about the well-poised head. And,

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to her fancy, the smile, half gleeful, half sad, was peculiarly like that of the stranger. Reminding her of him, it reminded her also that the picture, with its smile and its eyes, belonged to him. She aroused from her reverie.

"M'sieu!" she called, putting down the pail, and running forward toward the spot where his horse had been. "M'sieu!"

Out of breath, she came to the brook.

"M'sieu!" she called again, and listened. There was no sound except those of the forest; the stream, the birds, the trees. He had gone. Of course he had gone, long ago, before she found the picture. She could never find him, mounted on The Wind. She smiled pensively. She liked the name of his horse. It seemed a part of him, swift, changing, mysterious. She slipped the picture shyly into her bosom, and kept her hand clasped over it as she retraced her steps. It was a sign that she should see him again, and that she might serve him.

She must hurry now, or Franchette would be very angry. She almost ran up the path, sliding now and then on the slippery pine carpet, snap-

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ping the twigs of dead, lower branches that bordered her way. He would not carry the picture with him if it were not dear to him. He would be sorry to have lost it, and she could bring it back to him. Then he would be glad, and he would thank her. A squirrel darted out into the path and hopped along before her, stopping occasionally to peer back at her. How beautiful and how friendly everything was, the squirrel, and the birds, the trees and the sunlight gleaming through. "Gleam o' Dawn." She wondered who the strange Indian girl of the picture was. Perhaps it was some one he had seen, and had liked for a picture. But why did he carry with him the visualized memory of her? Perhaps he had loved the girl of the picture. Nini's steps lagged. Something like dread tugged at her heart. But the picture had seemed very old. She would look at it again and be certain. And so she came to the clearing.

A half hour later Nini was left alone in the hot kitchen. Franchette had not been angry. She had not been even inquisitive. She had said little; but often Nini had found the older woman eying her, and invariably Franchette looked away

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quickly, going on with her work, muttering to herself. In her simplicity Nini did not comprehend the woman's mingled awe and fear for her. She knew only that Franchette was different, and she was glad, this afternoon most of all, to escape her inquisitive questions. She had been longing for the opportunity to be by herself, and often, in the midst of her work, her fingers had sought her bosom apprehensively. Now she drew forth the picture and studied it again. Yes, it was very old. The bark was cracked in places, and she could see with what delicate care it had been mended and fastened anew to the wood. He must have painted it many years before, when he was very young. It did not seem singular to her that he should have been able to do it when he was a mere lad. It was all part of the mystery of him, the marvel of him.

"Nini, M'sieu wishes you — *vite*." Franchette was at the door. "He has a letter that the crazy fiddler bring from Keelend."

There was no time to hide the picture. Franchette was coming in. Nini let it drop upon the shelf, and her face flushed like a guilty child's

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as she glided past Franchette and out into the clearing. There, in the fading afterglow, M'sieu stood awaiting her.

At first she barely heard what M'sieu said. She was thinking of the stranger's treasure she had left behind her. She was only dimly aware of M'sieu's courtly manner. She saw the shelf, and the picture lying face downward. And she hated her subterfuge, her foolish cowardice, and she quaked with unformed fears. Then she caught the name of Pere Baptiste, and she listened perforce, always watching the kitchen door, wishing that she might dart back within. Once certain of the picture, she could give her attention comfortably to what Pere Baptiste had written to M'sieu.

Pere Baptiste had been ill, very seriously ill, M'sieu said. Poor Pere Baptiste! She remembered how he had been ill years ago, and how she had cared for him. And now, M'sieu continued, he had found that he was needed far away in the north. He could not know how long a time he would be away, but, by and by, when he returned he was coming to see her. (Franchette appeared in the kitchen door and looked about. One hand

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was held cautiously behind her. Nini's fingers fidgeted. What was in Franchette's hidden hand?)

Pere Baptiste hoped that she was happy, happier than she had ever been with him. Good Pere Baptiste! She always had been happy with him except when he was busy with his books, and then, too, she had been happy in her way. He knew, M'sieu read on, that M'sieu Huntworth would be kind to her. (Pierre was coming from the stable. Franchette was hurrying toward him. And always the hand was hidden. Nini's finger nails dug into her palm. She tried to make herself pay heed to M'sieu. There was nothing to fear. Franchette would merely upbraid Pierre for something he had not done — or perhaps —)

Pere Baptiste hoped that she was doing her reading, and the studying he had marked out for her. That was like Pere Baptiste, always anxious about her books. He believed — (Franchette was flourishing something at Pierre. Nini's hand lifted automatically. It was the picture.)

"You say that I know not the Indian," Franchette gloated loudly. "You think I know nothing at all, I who have lived at St. Pierre for five

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years. The picture. *Voilà*. It is the Indian girl that I — oh, *le bon Dieu!* ”

Pierre had grabbed the picture from her hand. His bewilderment changed to a kind of devout ecstasy. Then came ferocious anger. Involuntarily Franchette stepped backward before his threatening gesture.

“Where-you-get?”

“It is only a joke, Pierre,” Franchette whined, cowed by his vehemence. “Something to laugh at you. It is not mine. Give it to me again. It was only a joke, only a joke, only a joke.”

“Where-you-get?” The repeated demand was more menacing. Mr. Huntworth had ceased reading the letter, and was listening, surprised, puzzled.

“Pardon, M’sieu.” Nini left him and confronted Pierre bravely. “It is mine, Pierre. Franchette should not have taken it.” She held out her hand.

“Where-you-get?” His voice was hard as flint, and his eyes burned with a feverish luster.

“It is the stranger’s, the man with the big, bay horse.” Nini was on the verge of tears, but she spoke with the courage of frankness. “He

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dropped it by the spring to-day. I found it. I shall return it to him. Give it to me, Pierre."

At the mention of the stranger the Indian grinned exultingly.

"I-give-to him," he said.

"No, no, Pierre. I found it. I must give it back. Please, Pierre."

For answer the Indian turned on his heel.

"I will speak to M'sieu," cried Nini. "He will make you —"

"No." Pierre whirled upon her and seized her wrist so roughly that Nini almost screamed with pain. And the look of his face, fierce, hard, malevolent, as he glanced past her toward Mr. Huntworth, dismayed her.

"Oh, *le bon Dieu!* What have I done?" groaned Franchette. "What have I done?"

"What is it, Nini?" called Mr. Huntworth, coming toward them.

Pierre was stalking away, with measured, unhurrying steps, but the memory of his look held the girl.

"It was nothing, nothing at all, M'sieu," she stammered. She kept her face from him so that

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he could not see the tears. Mr. Huntworth fumbled the paper in his hands, looking doubtfully from the girl to Franchette's red face, and to the Indian's receding back. Then blundering, well-meaning Franchette tried to make amends.

"But there is something, M'sieu," she cried. "It was my fault. I—"

"Franchette!" Nini commanded. "Do not tell M'sieu. It doesn't matter, M'sieu, truly. It was nothing."

This time Mr. Huntworth saw it all, the brimming eyes, the supplicating hands, the trembling figure.

"Go into the kitchen, Franchette," he said, and the woman obeyed, muttering imprecations upon herself. Then Mr. Huntworth put an arm about Nini's shoulders. He cleared his throat.

"Tell me about it, Nini." He was almost afraid of his own sympathy. The girl rocked with sobs under his arm. She had yielded herself, inexplicably, to the first touch of affection she had ever known. She almost forgot the picture, Pierre, her fears. A new emotion mastered her.

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She wept unrestrainedly and was glad of her tears. Unconsciously she crept closer under the kindly arm.

"If you are in trouble, ever, Nini," Mr. Huntworth went on awkwardly, "you must come to me as to a father."

"Oh, M'sieu," sobbed the girl, "I have always longed for a father. I have thought about him often. I never knew him, M'sieu, nor a mother, either. Often at night — Oh, M'sieu, how kind you are, how good you are!"

The old gloom returned to Huntworth.

"No," he said, half to himself. "I am not kind. I am not good. But tell me," he urged. "Let me help you, Nini. Did Pierre — ?"

At the word "Pierre" Nini controlled herself. She dried her eyes and stood erect.

"I was very foolish, M'sieu. It was nothing. I can't tell you."

She saw the depression in his face.

"I am sorry, M'sieu," she said. "You are very kind. I'll try never to wish for a father again."

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He straightened the sheets of paper in his hand.

"No, Nini, not that." He stopped confused, embarrassed, and then added abruptly: "Shall we read the rest of Pere Baptiste's letter?"

CHAPTER III

THE SHADOW IN THE DOORWAY

DAN SMITH sat in the doorway of the cabin, his head sunk upon his breast. Before him the early afternoon sun fretted the blue of the lake with gold. Beyond, crested billows of white cloud hung imminently above the green hilltops, as if the purity of all the heavens was about to break over the wanton world of color below. The incessant wash of water upon the sand seemed the peaceful breathing of a sleeping, silent earth. It was an hour to steal upon the world unaware, to capture a fragment of her beauty with brush and canvas. But the stranger sat unheeding, huddled upon the ragged, rotting sill. Behind him his canvases lay dry and his strewn brushes untouched.

Finally he shrugged his shoulders, to throw off his dejection.

"P'raps," he sighed to himself in his loneliness. "P'raps she return, all of herself. Is it

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not so? P'raps she know I look ver' long to fin' her. P'raps she leave me that she can know how I love her."

He tried to smile cheerfully, but it was not the smile of yesterday. He was tired. There had been no sleep for him in the cabin that night. When, after midnight, he discovered his loss, he had searched every nook and corner of the room, again and again. And after each fretful, fruitless hunt he was alternately angry with childlike, irrational anger, and jocund with a man's philosophical humor at himself, and downcast with peevish discouragement, and buoyant with confident hope.

With the first morning light, he was on the big bay's back in the intricate trail, seeking with keen eyes in underbrush and thicket. When he came to the road that wound down from the house on the hill, he was surprised to see, on the knoll above, a tall figure fronting the valley and the eastern sky. Instinctively he knew it was the Indian. As he looked, the arms of the solitary, distant shape spread toward him, above him. He drew rein, involuntarily impressed. The Indian swayed, and then disappeared. The artist himself

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faced toward the brightening horizon. His eye lighted with new hope and he urged the bay forward.

"*Merci*, frien' of the hill," he said blithely. "It is a good omen. Now I fin' her. See, the gleam of the dawn mak the eye sharp an' bright. It lead them."

It was not until the sun was high that his confidence waned. He retraced every step of yesterday's wanderings. At last he rode up along the brook, and crept on to the spring.

"See," he had said to The Wind when he left him. "Here I fin' her. Here I fin' one woman, an' I lose the other. It is the law, *n'est-ce-pas?* One woman, that is all."

For some time he tramped about in futile quest. As he explored every recess of the open space he realized, with growing irony, that he was attracted particularly to one spot, the place where the path issued from the woods, the path down which he had seen Nini come yesterday. Ultimately he sat down and lit a cigarette.

"You are ver' strange man, M'sieu, you who are call' Dan Smith," he remarked derisively.

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"You look with one eye for her that is with you alway, an' you look with the other eye for the li'l' brown girl of M'sieu Huntworth. It is not the right, but — it is you, you see. You laugh, you weep. You are strong, you are weak. You love, you hate. You have pride, you have shame. You have anger so much that everything is red lak blood, you are gentle lak a li'l' bird. You are brave lak a lion, you run away lak a squirrel. You are wil' of the wood, an' you are tame of the house an' all the people. You are ver' strange man," he went on half bantering, half bitter. "Alway you are two. An," — the bitterness increased — "it is not your fault. Alway you are lak that; alway you are to be lak that. A man he lak you, or a woman she love you, an' see, you jump quick on the back of The Win' an' ride away; an' you laugh or you weep, because you know all the time that you are a something outside. P'raps you wish the frien' or the love. It is not for you, you see." He finished the cigarette and rose to his feet. "*Eh bien*," he added, yawning. "What does it matter? It is a beeg, beautiful worl'."

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He wavered irresolutely. Then, with a quizzical grin he proceeded to the upward path.

"*Au revoir, Le Vent,*" he called to the horse. "See, I follow the way my laig lead me. An' the laig they follow the heart. An' the heart it follow its own sign-board. Who paint the sign-board, *le bon Dieu* or the Devil? Who knows? What does it matter?"

When he returned, half an hour later, he loosened The Wind's bridle and traversed the woods leisurely to where the brook ran under the roadway into the lake. He chatted to the big bay as he rode, as to an only friend.

"I see the M'sieu an' two frien', one ol', one young. An' they laugh with me ver' much. An' I laugh also. Why is it, *Le Vent*, that the lip smile ver' easy when the heart is sad? M'sieu is a kin' man. He sen' us the food, *Le Vent*. I lak him, an' I lak the young frien'. He is ver' young an' happy," he added, with a pathetic condescension. "An' I see the Indian, an' he look at me ver' much. I think we go away some other place, soon. The Indian, he mak me to think. I lak not to think, *Le Vent*. But the li'l' brown girl, she is

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not there. I look an' I wait, but she is not there."

Soon the quest of the picture absorbed him again. He investigated every rod of road along the lake shore, growing more dispirited as the minutes passed by, impressing failure upon him. Once he pulled up the big bay as he was passing a green copse that jutted out into the highway.

"P'raps," he muttered, "the li'l' man of the fiddle tak it. He sit before me so, and he turn many time. No,"—his teeth closing in a metallic click—"nobody can have her. I fin' her." He rode on. The mood passed. "Ah, no, I am not kin'. He not know. He is gentle. It is a good worl'."

It was an hour after noon when, disheartened, he came again to the cabin. And he had sat in the doorway a long time, hungry but knowing no hunger, seeing nothing of the beauty that encircled him, the memory of the pictured face possessing him. At last he arose, and going within, he tumbled upon the bunk.

"*Eh bien*," he said, staring at the discolored beams of the roof. "The day come, an' then, by 'n' by, it go. Why? Who knows? We live,

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an' then, by 'n' by, we die. Why? Who knows? But there is a reason. An' so she remain with me long time; then she go away, an' I cannot fin' her. Why? Who knows? But, again, there is a reason. It is bes'."

Soon he was asleep, while *The Wind* pulled restively at his bridle in the free air outside.

Voices, dim and indistinct, jarred upon his dreaming. He tossed, rolling to the wall. Then, at a sharp rap he sat bolt upright. For a moment he thought he was back in the old studio in Paris.

"*Entrez.*" He was still only half awake.

Mr. Huntworth poked his head in at the door. Dan Smith gaped first at him, then about the room, and burst into hearty, boyish laughter.

"Pardon, M'sieu. I jump three-four-thousand mile in one second. When you knock I am in Paris. I wake, an' see, I am in America, in Canada or in the United States. I know not which. It does not matter."

"In the United States," said Mr. Huntworth genially, as he and Young Thomas entered.

Dan Smith remained seated, his hands grasping the edge of the bunk.

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"I come so quick," he went on with a quaint grimace, "that it, what you say, 'jar me'—that the word?"

Young Thomas grinned shyly but sociably.

"Been asleep?" he suggested, for something to say.

"Sleep! *Oui*." Dan Smith meditated. "That is the name it is call'. I think too much. I look, an' this"—patting the bunk—"is soft, an' I lie down. Then I forget, an' I go long way away—three, four, five year ago. It is call' sleep. I know not that which it is. But it mak me to stop the thinking."

He saw Mr. Huntworth's tacit approval.

"You comprehend', M'sieur?"

"Yes, I comprehend." Huntworth's ready reply made a new link of inward comradeship between the two.

"You lived in Paris," said the older man, sitting down beside him. Young Thomas leaned awkwardly against the table, half sitting, half standing. He was ill at ease, for he felt his youth as he listened. "You studied, I suppose."

"Oh, *oui*. I go across the gret water when I

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am ver' young. I go to study. I rest there many year."

"Then you were born in America." It was half question, half discovery.

The artist moved uneasily.

"Yes," he said. "I am born in America." Then, with hasty transition: "But what is that? Is it not the thunder? An' see, while I sleep, the sun is run away an' hide."

He stepped to the door and stood looking out. Mr. Huntworth was annoyed at the palpable change of subject, but only for a moment. After all, it had often been his own way of meeting the curiosity of people.

"Yes." He arose also, Young Thomas following his example. "I think it will rain later. I must hurry on. There are some cedars below here, I must look at. By the way," he went on, as Dan Smith faced him, "I was going to ask you to do something for me while you are here. There is a spring near my house, with two fine old trees hanging over it. I've often thought I'd try to paint it myself, but I haven't had the courage. It's been years since I've tried to paint. I've won-

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dered," he hesitated, "I've wondered if you'd be willing to paint it for me, with the afternoon light on it through the pines. I'd pay you —"

"But, M'sieu," the artist interrupted impetuously, his teeth showing in a pleased smile. "I am glad, ver' glad. It is beautiful. I am there to-day, yesterday, both." He stopped, forgetful of his visitors, his eyes half closed. He remembered every detail of the setting, the cool green water in the shadow of the great trees, the little rifts of afternoon light playing vagrantly on its surface, the huge stones with their moss-covered rims, the soft, grassy margins and the dense background of rich greens and browns. Then he became alert with another memory.

"M'sieu," he added, exultant. "Only one thing is need'. When I fin' the place yesterday, M'sieu, there is a li'l' girl, all brown an' red, M'sieu,— her name, Nini, of your house. She is of the picture, M'sieu, you see? It is necessary." He spoke rapidly with increasing enthusiasm. "It is beautiful, M'sieu — a so beautiful picture." He paused before Mr. Huntworth's inquiring scrutiny. "You are — content, M'sieu?"

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Mr. Huntworth scanned the frank, eager face closely before he replied.

"Nini?" he said lamely. "I don't know. I didn't know you had seen her. She is — very young, Smith. She is —"

"Ah, M'sieu, but the color, you see?" pressed the artist. "I tak good care of her. I stop when she is tire'." Conscious for the first time of Mr. Huntworth's mistrust, he drew himself up proudly. "P'raps it is not bes'," he concluded shortly.

"I — I think it can be arranged." Mr. Huntworth changed front quickly. "It's all right if she is willing. By the way," he added, "what would be your price?"

Dan Smith frowned.

"I wish not money," he said testily. Then, at the older man's apologetic gesture, his frown changed to a shame-faced smile. "Pardon, M'sieu, I have pride — too much pride. You are my frien'. You are kin'. I lak you, you see?" His appealing candor was ingenuous, naïve. "It is pleasure to paint the picture for M'sieu." His face grew somber again. "I hate money," he

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added almost violently. "There is a reason. It is not possible that you comprehend. I hate money."

"All right. Thank you, Smith. I must go now." The terse sentences displayed his embarrassment. He touched the artist's arm with clumsy gratitude, as he passed him. "I'm very much obliged to you. Will you come along?"—this to Young Thomas—"or will you wait for me here?"

"Why, perhaps I'll wait." The boy came forward doubtfully. "That is, if Mr. Smith doesn't mind."

"But no," Dan Smith put in cordially. "I am glad."

"I'll come down and meet you, sir," called Young Thomas after Mr. Huntworth.

"All right. Follow the beach." Huntworth was lost to view behind the trees that grew close to the sandy shore.

The boy was evidently perplexed.

"I never know exactly what to do," he said ruefully. "He likes to be alone almost always, and I feel in the way. He never talks much to me, but

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he asked me to come to-day. I thought he'd rather go on alone, but he looked surprised when I said I'd stay here. Usually he'd rather be alone."

"P'raps he change, that is all," Dan Smith said consolingly. "One day I lak to be alone. One day I lak many people. Is it not so, my frien'? The change is bes' of all."

"Yes," assented young Thomas, "but he's always the same. But"—with youthful confusion—"perhaps you'd rather I'd gone along."

"No," Dan Smith said quietly. "I lak not to be alone to-day."

By now the sky was completely overcast, and the interior of the cabin was in obscure gloom. Young Thomas sat down on the doorsill, his back against the half open door which was stuck fast against the warped flooring. From within his face was clear in the outer light. Dan Smith observed him with half cynical, half approving amusement. It was a good, frank, young face, clear-cut, honest, with a sturdy chin that went well with the compact, well-knit body. Wholesome, common-place, direct; these were its salient char-

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acteristics. The artist pulled some of the rolls of canvas from the table, and piled them in a corner. Then he found his camp stool and opened it.

"It's peculiar he's taken such a liking to you," remarked Young Thomas from the doorway.

"Yes?" Dan Smith interposed with a drawl.

"Oh, I don't mean that the way it sounds," Young Thomas corrected himself. "You don't know him. He's very slow with strangers, and I never saw him as interested in friends as he is in you. Now take that picture. Why, he'll hardly let me talk to Nini, and he's known me all my life."

Dan Smith was busy washing his brushes in an old can.

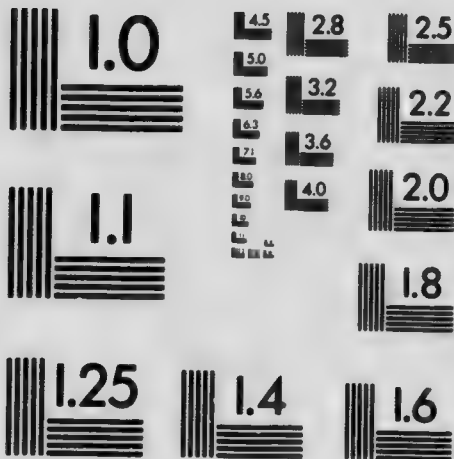
"Oh," he said, looking up. "P'raps that is the reason why he hesitate. It is difficul' for me to comprehen'. P'raps he have jealousy of her, *n'est-ce-pas?* "

"Jealous? Of Nini? Oh, no." Young Thomas scoffed at the idea. "It's not that. He's always that way about women. He doesn't even speak of them."



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"P'raps he is right," Dan Smith remarked with a wry smile. "A woman, she is ver' beautiful. I look an' I run away quick." His fingers halted over the brushes. "I forget — almos'. I say to-day I go away soon. Now — there is the picture, you see?"

"Go away? What for?"

"I lak not to rest in one place long time," he said laconically.

"Oh, I hoped you'd stay." There was genuine regret in Young Thomas's voice. "I'm pretty well alone up here, you know," he added, apologetic for any expression of feeling that might seem like sentiment. "Anyhow you promised to paint the picture."

"*Oui*, I promise." He finished his task.

The boy jumped up with ungainly politeness, as the artist came to the door to empty the can. While Dan Smith gathered up his brushes the boy perched himself upon the table, his legs swinging.

"Why did you say that about women?" he asked unexpectedly, with the seriousness of clean-

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mindful youth. "That about running away, I mean."

Dan Smith smiled.

"I speak only of myself, my friend," he said. "I run away. It is best. You — perhaps you stay. It is best also. *Voilà*. There is a difference, that is all."

"I suppose so," Young Thomas agreed dubiously. "But don't you believe in love?"

The artist's smile broadened.

"One love much and show much," he said, to make his point clearer. "Another he love like I and show much. And, perhaps, another love much and show like I, you see?" Then, seeing the boy's perplexity increase rather than diminish, he added gently: "But yes, I believe in love — as you say, my friend. Many times I believe in nothing else."

There was a pause. Young Thomas sat brooding. Then he came to a speedy decision.

"I'm going to tell you about it," he said. He spoke rapidly, as if he feared he might change his mind before he could finish. "I can't talk to my father. He's all business, and he wouldn't

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listen to it. And of course I can't talk to Mr. Huntworth. It's — it's Nini, sir. I think she's more beautiful than any girl I ever saw, and she's as sweet and as kind as she is beautiful. But I'm not allowed to talk to her more than to say 'Good morning.' I tried to have her teach me French this summer, but Mr. Huntworth stopped that. My father would either laugh at me or be angry if he knew about it. And I don't see why. She's perfectly ladylike, even if she is a kind of servant. I think she likes me but, then, she seems to like every one." His tone became complaining. "I don't quite know what to do. I've got to go away myself next month — back to college — and I know I'll miss her, and"—He stopped, flustered. "There," he stammered, "I suppose you think I'm a fool."

He found no ridicule in Dan Smith's stolid mask nor in the labored cheeriness of his calm reply.

"No. I not think you are a fool. P'raps you are ver' sage. She is ver' beautiful. Who knows?" His eyes were on the flushed, downcast face before him, but he saw only the little brown girl kneeling before the spring.

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"One say love is to laugh, to be glad," he suggested with simulated lightness. "P'raps she hear, an' come, an' laugh also. She not follow the sober face an' the sigh."

"But you can't laugh when you're not happy," the boy argued, with matter of fact seriousness. "That would be a sham, and you couldn't do it anyhow."

"Not happy?" It was part question; part musing. Then he tried again. "One say love is not tenderness, *amitie et tout cela*. It is fight, mil-i-tant — that the word? The stronges' win."

"I'd fight for her," declared Young Thomas vigorously. His bravado left him before the stranger's penetrating gaze. "That is, if I could," he added, abashed.

"Again one say love is not to have but to give. It is to comprehen' all an' forgive all." This time Young Thomas said nothing, and Dan Smith, measuring him, remembered that he was young.

"But, my frien'," he said, dismissing it all with a wave of the hand. "I can not know. P'raps one never know. One only dream."

He strolled leisurely to the door.

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"I wish I knew what to do," reiterated the boy. "I like to do things. I can't sit by and —" He realized the meaning of the artist's movement and slid from the table. "I know I haven't any right to bother you," he said remorsefully. "I just had to talk to somebody. You're a stranger, and not interested at all, and I knew you'd understand. And — well — you've helped me just listening."

Dan Smith whirled about, and put a hearty hand on the boy's shoulder.

"It is right, my frien'. I am glad," he said tranquilly. Then he added: "But some are born to love an' some are born to hate, that is all."

Dan Smith started as heavier thunder rumbled above them.

"Pardon, my frien'," he said. "The Win'— that is my horse — not lak the thunder. I go to him an' return quick."

Left alone, Young Thomas, for something to do, rummaged idly among the litter on the table's edge. When the artist returned, leading the excited bay, the boy was flipping the pages of an old book.

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"Find this here?" called Young Thomas, almost derisively.

"He lak to be with me when the thunder come," Dan Smith remarked, as he tied The Wind at the door.

"No," he said, entering the cabin and catching sight of the book in the boy's hand. "I bring it."

The book was a French Bible, its cover brown with age and use, its leaves, many of them, loose and hanging.

"I read it much," he said simply. "It is good."

"And this?" chaffed Young Thomas, holding up a soiled pack of cards, mirthful at the contrast.

"*Oui*, that also," Dan Smith nodded. "Strange comrade, is it not so, my frien', but they travel many road together. They are gift — both. One, a man — he is a pries', I think — a good man an' a frien' to me, give me," — he checked himself with sudden reticence — "when I am young. The other, Madame Marti, she show

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me to tell the fortune, when I am in Paris. She is a ver' strange woman, Madame Marti. She —"

"Can you tell fortunes, then?" The idea of something novel diverted the boy. "Tell mine, will you? Of course," he added, "I don't believe in that sort of thing, but it would be interesting. I never had my fortune told."

Dan Smith frowned dissent at first. Then:

"Certainly, my frien'," he acquiesced. "If you wish it. P'raps it is not good, you see, but if you wish it —"

"Oh, it won't bother me," Young Thomas declared. "I'm not a bit superstitious."

Complying, the artist slid the cards from their cover, and shuffled them, with his deft, coiling fingers.

"You are certain, my frien'?" he reiterated. His potent solemnity made a sudden lump come in the boy's throat. But he nodded assent.

"Cut, if you please." Dan Smith's voice was hard and incisive.

Twice he repeated the request, and Young Thomas obeyed automatically. It was so dark in the little room that the stranger seemed only

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an uncanny shadow to the boy. Young Thomas could hear his own breathing, and, ashamed, tried to stifle it. His gaze fixed upon the cards, the artist began in oracular monotone.

"I see much that is yellow lak gol'. You be rich. I see the face of a girl an' her hair is gol'. But her hair turn gray, by 'n' by, an' your gol', also." Then, more resonantly: "Not to be ver' ol'. Not to be ver' gret. Be ver' happy one day, soon. 'The bird sing in your heart an' the rose bloom. Then winter come. Bird fly away an' rose dead. You not remember long."

As he finished, the first flare of lightning lit up the dark room. A muffled sound, that might have been a sigh or a quick intake of breath, came from Young Thomas. He stumbled bunglingly over the artist's camp stool.

"Have not fear," Dan Smith reassumed his casual lightness. "P'raps it is not true. Madame Marti is wrong many time. It is only the card, my frien', you see? I say that which I see, that is all. P'raps I am, what you say, cross-eye."

Young Thomas tried to laugh.

"The lightning startled me a little, I guess," h-

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explained. "It wasn't what you said, of course."

He was plainly disquieted, however. The uncanny grip of the stranger's personality had made the words momentarily real and terrifying. His childhood dislike of a dark room recurred to him now. Even the soft tread of the artist, who was picking up and unfolding again the camp chair, augmented his inward agitation.

"I — I think I'll go down and meet Mr. Huntworth," he said, edging toward the door. Once outside his boldness returned. "We may stop in for shelter, you know," he went on rapidly. "It's going to be a hard shower, don't you think so? And — and thanks for — for letting me stay and talk with you."

"I am sad if I frighten my frien'," Dan Smith called from the doorway, but Young Thomas had gone. A whinnying brown nose snuggled against the artist's arm. "It is easy to be brave, before an' after, eh, *Le Vent*?" he ruminated. "It is easy to laugh when the sky is all bright. But he is young. He lak to live." His mouth twisted into a cynical smile. "One lak to live an' he cannot," he went on, striking the horse gently with the

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flat of his hand. "An' one lak to die an' he cannot. It is the life. It is a strange worl'."

There was a more luminous flare of lightning, followed tardily by thunder, like far away cannonading. Dan Smith became almost gleeful, his variable mood rejoicing in the sudden upheaval of the elements.

"No," he said, "it is a good worl'."

He returned within, to the table. There he groped about until his hand touched the Bible. He knocked its back upon the wood carefully, pressing the loose leaves into place. He started toward the better light again. At a flame of lightning he stopped short, confounded; for the light had played about a tall, slightly stooped figure in the doorway, which remained a dark shape, silhouetted against the leaden sky and the farther mist. Dan Smith waited in his amazement, every sense vigilant, struggling between hostility and friendliness. The brightness had for a second made clear the forbidding face of the Indian, Pierre.

"You-alone?" asked the guttural voice. The shape loomed, inanimate in the doorway. Only the

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brilliant eyes, like those of a wild animal, fluctuated, peering into the dusk.

"*Oui*," said Dan Smith, reverting unconsciously to the French, his mind focused upon the Indian.

There was a significant interval. Dan Smith felt again the indescribable sense of warning that had troubled him earlier in the day.

"Think-see-young man-go. Pierre wait. He go?" suspiciously.

"*Oui*, he go."

Again there was suspense, the two still facing each other, unstirring, as if held by a supernatural force. Then the Indian, with majestic dignity, extended his hand.

"Where-you-get?"

There was something in the outstretched hand. Dan Smith moved forward, cautious, alert. Then, with a quick cry, he seized the object which the Indian held forth and wrenched it from his fingers. He slipped the lost picture under his shirt and stepped back defensively.

"Where-you-get?"

"It is mine," said Dan Smith. "It is enough. I thank you. It is mine."

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In long strides the figure advanced. It stopped squarely before the artist, a gaunt, menacing shape. The hand was lifted again deliberately, and snake-like fingers shot out to Dan Smith's neck.

"Where-you-get?"

Dan Smith backed away. The fingers on the scar seemed to open a wound deep down to his very heart. He caught the edge of the table with one hand to steady himself. He had crouched, stealthy, as if preparing for attack. Now he drew himself up, with stately composure, one hand gripping the worn Bible, the other protectingly upon his breast, above the picture.

"Speak, my frien'," he said.

The low answer, almost a chant, was unreal, akin to the phantomlike outline from which it came.

"Name-no-Dan Smith. Name-Dan Red-Feather. Son of Gleam o' Dawn."

The artist's hand rested more heavily, more shieldingly, over the hidden picture.

"It is true," he said, flinging back his head proudly. "Speak on, my frien'."

With an exultant exclamation, the voice went

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on, more human, altering; now a fawning undertone, now harsher, guttural, angry; making the fateful story that it told come from the faraway past, and live vividly in the alternating tones of elemental love and hate, joy and sorrow, loyalty and bitterness. But always, to the artist, as he stood, taut, rigid, in the dusk, the Indian was only a semblance, and his recital that of an inner voice, reminding him of something which for many years he had tried to forget.

“Gleam o' Dawn. Princess of Tribe. One day — young paleface come. He lost — much tired — starve. Indian kind. He stay. He say — he be Indian. Good. Call him Blue Cloud. He see Gleam o' Dawn. He wish her. Indian, Lynx Eye, love her. They fight — with knives —” The voice grated with ancient enmity. “Paleface win — trick. He marry Gleam o' Dawn. Child — boy — Red Feather. One day paleface go away — not come back. Gleam o' Dawn — sick at heart — not live long. Paleface — coward — kill her.”

“It is true.” Dan Smith answered his own memory rather than the Indian. Then, as the

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figure near the door moved perceptibly, "An' you, my frien'?"

The glittering eyes told him before the voice went on, triumph mingling with respect, that was near to reverence, in its tones.

"Gleam o' Dawn die. Lynx Eye no stay. Leave tribe. Many summers fish — hunt. Many winters — trap. Guide paleface. Always hate."

The shadow stalked closer to the artist, so close indeed that Dan Smith could see the leathery face, distorted with fury.

"One day — guide Blue Cloud."

The Bible dropped from Dan Smith's hand, with a thud upon the floor.

"He remember — afraid. Lynx Eye say *he* old, *he* tired now, *he* starve. Get food — place to sleep — call Pierre. One day see strange man — see smile of Gleam o' Dawn. See cut on neck. But Red Feather strange. No Indian. No paleface. Strange. Get picture — Blue Cloud make — when he marry Gleam o' Dawn. Lynx Eye sure. Come to Red Feather."

Dan Smith was transformed. Every mark upon him of civilization was suddenly erased. He had

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become a thing primitive, elemental, savage. His hand clutched the powerful shoulder opposite him.

"M'sieu Huntworth," he said, in a hoarse, unnatural whisper. "He is my father."

The recital continued, heedless of the interruption. It was more solemn, pregnant of superstition, of deep conviction.

"Each morning — Lynx Eye — swear to kill. Always he wait. Maybe — she, Gleam o' Dawn — will it. Maybe — she will Blue Cloud — die by hand of Red Feather. Maybe — each day — she lead Red Feather. Now — he come. It is done."

"M'sieu Huntworth!" The guttural voice might almost have been Pierre's, except for the artist's accent. The past seemed to have grasped the stranger and to have drawn him back within itself. "He leave Gleam o' Dawn, my mother, to die. He say he to be alway Indian. He alway white, alway coward. He run away. He forget me; mak me to be nobody; sen' money long time after. Bah! It is the story they tell me when I am ol' enough to know." He hurled the Indian from him with such might that Pierre staggered

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backward, striking heavily against the open door. "I hate him. I hate the coward blood in my vein. I hate, hate, hate!" His long arms strained outward toward the instantly vivid heavens, his hands clenched, his face contorted.

Pierre crept stealthily back toward him, but stopped out of range of the threatening arms.

"Red Feather-kill?" The low whisper was more like a venomous hiss than a human sound.

"Red Feather kill." The artist's arms dropped to his sides, but his body was still crouched, violent. "A hundred time. It is not enough. He break her heart. She die. He break my heart. I not die. It is worse. I hate, hate, hate!" His form shook as with a paroxysm of pain accumulated through many years.

The Indian bent forward as if to speak again. Then he straightened, listening. He glided to the door. A tongue of lightning licked about him, with unnatural, sinister flame.

"Someone come — Red Feather promise — He promise Gleam o' Dawn?"

The artist pulled at his breast, and a gray something showed in his hand.

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"I promise Gleam o' Dawn," he said.

The Indian slunk from sight. There was a crash of thunder and Dan Smith, whirling, searched frantically about the table, dropping the picture to use both hands.

"Someone come," he gulped hysterically. "I care not. I care for nothing. The card — p'raps the card poin' the way."

As he spoke his hand seized the pack. With maddened haste he cut the cards, once, twice, thrice, muttering unintelligible words that came back to him from his boyhood. He stooped to see the upturned faces —

"M'sieu," said a tremulous voice.

He was erect in an instant, and silent.

"I thought I'd be here and back before it rained. It's just beginning." Nini was encouraged as she saw him move. "I'm coming in," she added, naively, stepping across the threshold.

The only sounds were the patter of the first drops of rain upon the roof, and the nervous pawing of the big bay horse outside. There was no answer to her greeting.

"I've been trying to get away all day," she

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went on, the tremulous tone coming again. "But Franchette kept me busy and I couldn't. I wanted to tell you, although I was sorry and ashamed."

She advanced bravely to the table.

"I found your picture, M'sieu, the picture of the Indian girl. And then"—she stopped short—"well, M'sieu, Pierre got it and"—She flinched as an almost stunning blaze of lightning lit up the room, showing the picture lying before her, upon the table. Clashing thunder followed close.

"Oh, you've found it, M'sieu. Then it was Pierre I saw at the door. He said he would bring it to you. Where has he gone, M'sieu? He will be drenched."

Dan Smith cleared his throat.

"I not know, Mamselle," he said, huskily. "He come an' he go."

"He ought not to be out in this storm." Nini started for the door.

"Do not call to him, Mamselle." Dan Smith was peremptory. Strangely enough the hoarseness was gone, and in its place was a hint of the old kindness. Nini obeyed reluctantly.

"It was good of him to bring you the picture,"

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she said. "I was afraid he wouldn't. He was queer about it. He wouldn't give it back to me after Franchette — after he once had it. And then Franchette says Indian blood is bad. Do you think it is, M'sieu?"

"No." He lingered over the word. Then he gathered up the three cards and shuffled them into the pack. As he did so, "I can not know," he argued to himself. "P'raps it is not true. P'raps he lie. I can not know."

"What is it, M'sieu?"

Her solicitude suggested something to him.

"Tell me," he demanded earnestly. "You say yesterday that M'sieu — M'sieu Huntworth is kind to — to — Pierre. It is true?"

"Oh, yes, M'sieu, he is kind to everybody." The heavens seemed to break in ragged light and shattering thunder. Involuntarily Nini stepped back. She stumbled slightly, and bent down to pick up the obstacle.

"A book, M'sieu," she said, giving it to him.

He was about to lay it on the table, but he changed his mind.

"It is the Bible." Again he was speaking more

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to himself than to the girl. "He — the pries'— say, when I have trouble I am to read, an' com- prehen'. It is long ago. P'raps —"

"That is what Pere Baptiste used to say," Nini broke in. "And he said also that we should read the ten commandments every day. They tell everything you mustn't do, you know. I know them by heart. 'Thou shalt not steal.' 'Honor thy father and thy mother.'" Nini hesitated wist- fully. "'Thou shalt not covet,' 'Thou shalt not kill'—"

Nini's hand was caught in the artist's grasp. The pressure of the long fingers, soft at first, in- creased until it was vise-like. Then, all at once, they relaxed.

"Why did you do that, M'sieu?" she asked.

As she spoke they heard voices outside calling, and the sound of hurrying feet, coming nearer.

"It is M'sieu Huntworth," he said, listening. He took Nini's hand once more, gently this time.

"Pardon, Nini," he begged. "I am ver' strange. You cannot com- prehen'. I am ver' strange. I am —"

He stammered and, releasing her fingers, he

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walked to the door. He could hear the panting of the running men above the noise of the increasing wind and beating rain. Doubtfully, indecisively, he loosened the rope that held The Wind. As he did so Young Thomas appeared from behind the trees. The artist scarcely noticed him. He gazed, fascinated, at the place where the edge of the wood met the curving beach line. Beyond, the rain, in gray torrents, swept the lake. A stocky figure, that ran lumberingly, as if the weight of years and lack of breath were checking a vigorous, indomitable spirit, came into view. Dan Smith turned to Nini.

"You have company, now," he said, with a wave of one hand toward the men, the other being busy with the dancing bay. "*Au revoir*, Nini."

"But, M'sieu —"

Nini had time only for the exclamation. With an agile spring, he was on the back of the careering horse, just as the two men came up, staggering, drenched, spent.

"Ay!" Dan Smith shouted warningly, and Young Thomas jumped back just in time to miss the flying hoofs of the horse, which was whirling,

THE SHADOW IN THE DOORWAY

under iron guidance, to the left. "Pardon, my frien'. *Au revoir*, Nini."

The girl, with a frightened little cry, had darted out into the open, and stood beside the heavily-breathing men. As they looked, the heavens cracked above them. The glaring, deafening instant seemed an eternity. The three stood stunned in the throbbing silence that followed. Dan Smith had disappeared, but still they stared at the spot where they had seen him, clinging to the back of the rearing, maddened bay horse, a weird, unearthly shape in the glare, against the pallid green of the forest.

Mr. Huntworth was the first to come to himself. Catching Nini by the arm, he almost carried her into the cabin.

"What are you doing here, Nini?" he demanded.

But Nini sank into a pitiful heap upon the floor.

"He'll be killed," she moaned. "He'll be killed."

CHAPTER IV

" TO LOVE YOUR ENEMY "

NINI had been told to await them at the spring, but she had wandered idly on, among the primeval pines. Now she sat, leaning back against a huge gray-green rock, whose jagged ledge was softened by the brown needles from the trees. Her legs were drawn up close to her body, and were comfortably clasped by her bare fore-arms over the red skirt. Before her, down the leisurely slope, stretched the thick, velvety carpet, woven of cool, dun shadows and the filtering light of the morning sun. Here and there, little spots of green struggled through the brown from the moist, buried earth, while everywhere was a helter-skelter of curving cones and limbs and branches, dead things which the trees had sloughed off in their upward growth. And all about her stood the pillared pines themselves, straight and stalwart, their dark green tops glistening and lace-like against the blue sky and the changing white of cloud.

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Silence and repose were everywhere about her. The sleepy breathing of the breeze in the trees, the ceaseless humming of the brook, the drone of insects, the faraway snatches of bird melodies; only these interrupted the silence, vitalized the peace. And so she sat, bundled, snug and warm, against the shaggy rock; leaning back, her head pillowed by her thick hair; gazing up through lanes of green at the sky; breathing in slowly, deeply, the perfumed air; dreaming, thinking, wondering.

The spot where the stranger had tied his horse the other day was only a few yards away. And now, soon, he was to paint, and she was to be part of the picture. His incredible prophecy, which had half alarmed, wholly pleased her, had come true already. He could make everything come true. She smiled.

M'sieu had been very serious that morning. He had asked Nini again, how it had happened that she was at the artist's cabin the night before, and Nini had told him nothing. Instinct taught her not to tell the truth, and her open mind knew no subterfuge. Yes, M'sieu had been very serious. Then the stranger had arrived, and had changed

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everything. He had spoken of the storm and of his extraordinary desertion. She could repeat his very words. "The Win' not lak the thunder. I jump on his back an' we run away. By 'n' bye the thunder go far away an' stop. Then The Win' ver' proud. He think he run more fas' than the storm, you see?" And then he had laughed, that magical, musical laughter of his, and M'sieu had laughed also. And soon all four of the men had been talking at once, about many things, and, in the end, about this picture the stranger was to paint for M'sieu. But — Nini's brows creased at the recollection — there had been something odd about the way he had looked at M'sieu. Sometimes his face reminded her of the glimpse she had caught the night before, not gentle nor merry nor even friendly. She had had a feeling of a momentary, inexplicable change. He had been totally different, another person. And when Pierre — After all she was a child. He was too big, too wonderful, too all-knowing for her to understand, that was all. She remembered acutely, almost painfully, how her pulse had quickened when he

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looked at her and smiled, and how her heart had leaped with stifling joy when she had heard his horse's hoofs, and had seen him come galloping over the knoll with a shout of greeting — safe, unharmed after all by the storm. She did not try to explain it. Her mind paused, inarticulate, and her shining eyes closed dreamily.

The sound of some one crackling through the dead pine limbs behind her, near the spring, aroused her from her mood. Her first thought was of him, and impulsively she raised herself and peeped over the rock. He sank back, with an irritation that was new to her. It was young M'sieu Thomas. She might have known it was not the stranger, for he always moved quietly, easily, as if he were a living part of the woodland. This bungling, noisy coming was something apart, a jarring note in the tranquil stillness. But Young Thomas evidently had seen her. He had stopped when her head bobbed above the rock, but now he came forward unerringly. She could hear every footfall and hoped, wondering the while at her own wish to be left alone, that he might pass her by.

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Often in these last few days Nini had scarcely recognized herself in her own thoughts and actions. And it troubled her.

"There's no use in hiding," cried Young Thomas, sauntering up to the rock, and looking down admiringly at the loose tangle of bronze hair that burnished the brown neck. "I knew I could find you and I did," he added with youthful triumph.

"I was not hiding, M'sieu." It was the only way in which she noticed his coming.

Young Thomas followed along the rock until he stood beside her. Then, because she did not look up at him, he swaggered on in front of her, and sat down at her feet, challengingly.

"Then why did you get down behind the rock when you saw me?" he demanded, half imperatively, half shyly, with the desire of a matter-of-fact person to know the reasons, pleasant or unpleasant, for everything.

Nini clasped her legs more closely. The blatant voice had shattered her aloneness. She was not annoyed at the boy, merely at the disturbance.

"I looked to see who it was," she answered with

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ready frankness. "I saw that it was you and sat down again, that was all."

Young Thomas pouted.

"That's unkind," he said, his vanity touched. "I was looking for you."

Nini saw that she had hurt him, and was sorry.

"Unkind?" She was puzzled. "I didn't mean to be unkind." Her sympathy and regret were evident. "But why were you looking for me, M'sieu?" she added innocently.

Young Thomas took it for encouragement. He judged her by the girls and women he had known in civilization. He could not understand her innocence and candor, her unselfish sweetness.

"It's good of you to make it easy for me," he said, gulping down unaccustomed embarrassment, his nerves tingling with his prompt bravery. "I've wanted to tell you something for a long time. I—I haven't had a chance, you know. Everybody has kept us apart." He hesitated lamely.

"Something to tell me?" Nini's wide eyes were kindly. "What is it, M'sieu?"

Young Thomas had an intuition of mistake, of defeat. Then, reason and impulse overcoming in-

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stinct, he pressed forward and caught her hands boldly, clumsily.

"I love you, Nini. That's it. Don't you see? I love you." He stammered before the girl's unchanging, kindly eyes.

"It is very good of you, M'sieu," she said pleasantly. His touch bothered her. It brought a singular, bounding thrill. She did not take her hands away. If she had had the impulse she would have left them, rather than hurt him again. "It is good to have people love one, is it not?"

Again Young Thomas did not understand. He edged closer, with new confidence, certain that his advances were desired, since they were not repelled.

"Do you love me, Nini?" he asked.

"Oh, yes." Nini winced as his hand closed upon hers. "I love everybody," she hastened on.

"I was taught to love even my enemies. And you are not my enemy, are you, M'sieu?"

"Well, hardly." She felt his arm slipping about her waist, drawing her toward him. Then something within her warned the girl. She sprang to her feet, casting off his detaining hand with

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her trained strength. She stood over him, quivering, physically weak.

"Why did you do that, M'sieu?" There was no anger, only startled, importunate surprise. "And why did you hold my hand so hard? I do not understand, M'sieu."

The boy was baffled, and his young egotism and his experience told him it was not his fault.

"I told you I loved you," he said, justifying himself shamefacedly.

"Are you always like that with people you love?" Nini cross-examined him with growing doubt and anxiety. Then, seeing his dejection, she continued: "I do not understand, M'sieu. It is new to me. I do not like it." She faltered, remembering the thrill of his touch. "I think I do not like it," she added. "It makes me afraid, I don't know why."

She waited for him to speak. Then, at the sound of voices, she glanced away toward the spring in time to see the tall, lithe form of Dan Smith emerge from the path above, followed by the shorter, heavier figure of Mr. Huntworth.

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She turned to the glum, sulky boy, and her impulse was to run from him to the two men by the spring. Trembling, the young girl, who had never in her life known fear, yearned for protection.

"They are coming," she said, and started up the incline, almost at a run.

Young Thomas lifted himself up furtively, and saw Mr. Huntworth's broad shoulders through the trees. He thought of flight. Something in the girl's manner made him ashamed, almost afraid to meet the men. He saw Nini join them and heard the indistinct greeting. Then pride goaded his youthful defiance. He had been perfectly serious. He had done her a great honor. He was not to blame if she had failed to understand. He lounged forward with ostentatious aimlessness toward them, stopping now and then to snap off a dead lower branch that blocked his way, flipping the little sticks from his fingers with careless bravado. On the way, however, a sense of self-abasement and unworthiness came over him. When he reached the spring he was, against his will and

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his reason, more humble, perhaps, than he had ever been in his life.

They barely noticed him when he came up. Mr. Huntworth was talking. Dan Smith was concentrated upon what he was saying, and, even more, upon the man himself. Pierre, who evidently had attended the men, stood near by, gloomy, expressionless, while the girl, slightly flushed, watched the stranger and M'sieu.

"The place caught me in the beginning," Mr. Huntworth was saying, with unusual enthusiasm for him. "It made me decide to build the house here. I've always loved the trees, and this is about the prettiest clump of pines I've ever seen."

Dan Smith's eyes contracted until they were thin slits of steely light.

"You love the tree," he remarked, "but you cut them down, is it not so, M'sieu?"

There was a scorn in his inflection that surprised and astonished Mr. Huntworth. It was unlike the stranger.

"Yes," Huntworth admitted. "It seems inconsistent. I've loved trees ever since — ever since

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I was a boy." Nini saw a surprised smirk widen Pierre's thick lips. "I have them cut down. That's business. But I never cut a tree down myself," he added.

The artist laughed, cynical, mocking laughter.

"P'raps," he jeered, "it is M'sieu's habit to cut down that which he love'—when he is young."

Amazement, fear, acute pain, and startled question chased in quick succession over Mr. Huntworth's face. He felt the artist's cutting gaze dissect him, and he saw the suspicion of contempt about his lips.

"What do you mean by that, my boy?" He spoke half placatingly, as if he was most desirous, for the moment, of regaining the younger man's respect, but there was doubt, demand, austerity as well, in the question.

Dan Smith's hardness melted. The sneer broke into a good-natured smile, and his blue eyes reflected the friendliness in those they met.

"Pardon, M'sieu," he said with a deprecatory, boyish laugh. "My min' it leap about lak a squirrel; my tongue, it wag lak the branch upon which the squirrel jump. An' see, quick, the squir-

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rel go an' the branch it can stop wagging. The same squirrel not jump on the same branch again — it is mos' probable. *Voilà*. It is the way with the min' an' the tongue, *n'est ce pas*, M'sieu. See," he changed the subject abruptly. "Mamselle is here. Now we can paint the picture for M'sieu."

Nini alone saw his swift glance at Pierre, and noticed the disappointment and suspicion that struggled with a remnant of gloating joy in the Indian's eyes. While Dan Smith skillfully arranged his traps for work, Nini brooded over him from a distance, like a mother pondering over a wayward child. She rejoiced in his gay chat. She was temporarily depressed by his morose silences. She sought to solve the enigma of his crafty, prying upward glances — as he bent over stool or easel — always at M'sieu. She had forgotten Young Thomas, who lay flat upon the ground, outwardly lazy and lolling, but fighting an inward disgrace. She was reminded again of the artist's manner the night before. She questioned Pierre's irresponsive face; then back to Dan Smith, feeling herself apart from him, yearning to read his moods. Once he turned to her, and she

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looked away with sudden relief, after an instant of hurried pulse and checked breathing, to where M'sieu stood. M'sieu appeared to be fascinated. Perhaps it was the swift, apt preparation of easel and canvas and brushes and palettes and paint-tubes. Perhaps it was the man, graceful, agile, dominant now over his work. Almost before she knew it, Nini was comfortably posed by the great trees above the spring, exactly where he had first seen her, she remembered.

"I'll go along now," Mr. Huntworth remarked, after the first few long, easy strokes of the brushes. "You won't care to have me looking over your shoulder," he added, with a certain pride at knowledge of the ways of the craft.

The artist smiled genially over his palette.

"It is kin', M'sieu. You compren'. One time you paint, is it not so, M'sieu?" He became stern. "P'raps I see what you paint, M'sieu." His voice was changed, hard, metallic.

"Oh, no, I think not," Mr. Huntworth rejoined, with a melancholy smile. "Nearly everything was — was lost long ago." He shot a sidelong

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glance at the Indian. "Come on, my boy," he added, precipitately, to Young Thomas.

"You lose them long time ago?" repeated Dan Smith. His eyes were focused upon the canvas, but his fingers wound about his pausing brushes convulsively. "One cannot know," he went on insinuatingly. "*Eh bien*, one who paint mus' tak care. P'raps he mak to live a face that is dead. P'raps he mak to be remember thät which he think is forgot. P'raps that which he throw away when he is young come back to strike him when he is ol'. P'raps —"

"That is all true." Mr. Huntworth cared to hear no more. "I wish I had all the poor things I did," he added, as the artist was about to speak again. Then, beckoning to Young Thomas, he turned on his heel. He had gone only a short way, however, when he faced about abruptly.

"I'll leave Pierre with you," he said. "You may need help — something from the house."

Dan Smith was displeased at the interruption, irritated at the suggestion. For the moment he dreaded the presence of the Indian.

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"I not need him."

"It's all right." Mr. Huntworth's geniality was forced. "I've arranged for him to be with you."

The artist frowned.

"But, M'sieu —," he objected. His eye met Young Thomas's. He remembered what the boy had told him the night before. Instantly, insulted pride transformed him. He was not trusted. Pierre was to be a kind of watch dog. His lips curled with resentment. "*Eh bien*," he said coldly, with an expressive shrug of his broad shoulders. "If M'sieu wish —" And he began to work once more.

Mr. Huntworth delayed as if uncertain, unsatisfied. Then the cracking of twigs and branches as they tramped away, and the discord of succinct conversation gradually diminished, leaving only the palpitating stillness of the pines, the ripple of the water, and the lazy bird-notes in the tree-tops. It was a long time before the silence was broken. The artist worked away with swift, soundless strokes, with quick, absorbed glances at Nini, which recognized her only as part of the picture, with

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"The artist worked away with swift, soundless strokes."

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swaying movements of his supple body as he studied effects. To Nini his face was a joy, with its changing lights and shadows, its ardent earnestness, its child-like, rapt expression, its vexed frown, its brisk, boyish smile, and all the flickering, transitory humors which swept his mobile countenance. She sighed with content between parted lips. Above them the Indian squatted, inanimate, lowering at the murky shadows where he had last seen Mr. Huntworth's broad back.

At last Pierre swung about, deliberately facing the artist. A moment later, Dan Smith, distracted by the steady gaze, looked up, annoyed.

"Huh! Paint-pretty picture-for him."

Dan Smith's exasperation increased.

"*Oui*," he said, glancing nervously from Nini to the canvas and back, as if to catch again the mood that had been broken.

"Why?"

Dan Smith turned upon him fiercely.

"Because I wish it." His tone was aggravated, dominating, superior. "I promise. I keep my promise."

The Indian's thick lips twisted in an ingratiating

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grin. He said nothing. Dan Smith was busy again with his canvas. He worked more slowly now, however, more uncertainly; crowding on color with heedless haste, stopping, shaking his head, frowning, working over. It was as if some malign influence had robbed him of his skill, leaving him vacillating, unsure. And Nini, seeing the change, was puzzled again and dismayed.

"He-love-the trees." The long arm indicated, in its stately swing, the brown, columned pines that stretched far away until they lost themselves in their own screening maze.

Dan Smith seemed to pay no attention, but Nini saw that his brush halted and touched the canvas tentatively, as if the artist's mind was far from his work.

Receiving no rebuff, the Indian grunted disdainfully.

"Huh. Good firewood. Burn good."

Dan Smith gave it up, and sat back, irritated, but there was a suggestive look on the copper-colored face, which mystified him, lured him. The Indian seemed to be trying, craftily, to tell him something. The swarthy forehead puckered. He

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looked away toward Nini with ostentatious carelessness.

"Pierre hope-trees-not get-fire. Much burn. Go quick-burn house-everything."

Dan Smith's eyes narrowed, as they had once before that morning, in a steely gleam. His mouth hardened. Something bitter, untamed, cruel, possessed his features. He leaned forward tensely like an animal scenting its prey. Then his expression changed. A more human look came, a softer, kindlier light. Again the pitiless hardness crowded out the gentler aspect. And so the struggle went on spasmodically. Neither the Indian nor the girl understood aright the fleeting changes, the hate of years fighting with the boyish affection of a day, elemental passion in conflict with more kindly impulses, blood at war with blood. But Nini's feminine subtlety realized that something was wrong.

"There is no way these woods can burn," she said with simple discernment. "There is nothing to set them afire, is there, M'sieu?" she appealed to the artist.

There came answering mastery on Dan Smith's

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face. He became the man who had been beside the spring with her two days before.

"No," he said with clear decision. "It is madness to think, Nini." He looked squarely, significantly at the Indian. "The tree here they cannot burn unless one set them afire in anger or in hate. He is bad man, is it not so? A good man, if he fight, fight in the day time, fair, even, an' the bes' man win."

The Indian listened, surly at first, in a quandary. Then he bowed gravely, with a sly, cunning glance from the corner of his eyes. Dan Smith saw the look. For a moment the memories of wrongs overcame the teachings of many years.

"It is that which the white man say," he said bitterly. "He say it a hundred time, he do it once."

"But no good man ever fights," declared Nini, troubled. "The Bible says we are to love our enemies."

Dan Smith stirred uneasily. It was the good book of the priest once more, and it was Nini speaking.

"Pierre." He took a long breath as he began.

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"Go, tell M'sieu Huntworth I paint no more to-day. Say to him I come to-morrow. I commence more early."

The Indian arose obediently.

"If he is not at his house," Dan Smith went on, "fin' him. Tell him that I have not the heart to paint to-day. To-morrow I do better."

The Indian grunted assent. He lingered a moment, distrusting, skeptical. Then he walked with measured steps up the path. Twice he looked warily over his shoulder while they were still in sight, but each time the man and the girl sat as he had left them.

"I am glad he has gone," Nini said, when he was concealed by the trees. "I do not trust him, M'sieu."

"To love our enemy," Dan Smith pondered. "You love your enemy, Nini?"

"I never had an enemy, M'sieu. I should think that something was very wrong with me if I had enemies."

Dan Smith disregarded the latter part of the girl's answer.

"S'pose," he said vehemently, "s'pose one mak

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you to suffer all the year you live. You try to forget, an' you can not. He is with you alway, ever' day, inside. He mak you hate yourself."

"I should try to forgive him, M'sieu." Nini met his excited question calmly. "I should try to be kind to him. I should try not to deserve it. Then if he did not relent, I should think that some of it was my own fault. It would be, wouldn't it, M'sieu?"

"P'raps," he said, but he was unconvinced by the girl's guileless doctrine. He was intent upon his inner conflict, trying to vindicate to himself his promise to the Indian. "S'pose," he went on relentlessly, "s'pose he kill your mother. S'pose he mak you ashame' to live."

"Oh!" Nini uttered a little cry of horror and of anguish. "I never knew my mother, M'sieu, but — I love her. It would be hard to forgive him that," she admitted.

"*Voilà!*" cried Dan Smith, exultingly. "You ask why men fight. It is to repay, to revenge."

The horror deepened on Nini's face.

"It can't be right," she said resolutely. Then she harked back to a phrase out of Pere Baptiste's

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teaching. "I will repay, saith the Lord." She repeated it devoutly.

Dan Smith's elation ebbed. It was the book again. The inner combat began afresh.

"But why do you talk so, M'sieu?" she begged. "It is not like you. You are so gentle and kind and good. Why do you talk of fighting and hating, M'sieu?"

Her troubled entreaty banished hate, for the moment, from the artist's heart.

"Pardon, Nini," he said tenderly. Nini felt herself suddenly irradiated, warmed, breathlessly happy. "You are a ver' beautiful girl, Nini." He lifted himself up to his full height and started impulsively toward her, his eyes alight. "Ver' beautiful, ver' sweet, ver'—" Her ecstatic face, his own realization of what he was, cautioned him. For an instant his ardent gaze seemed to envelop her, to draw her toward him, to caress her. Then he turned his back, and began fumblingly to pick up his traps. "Forget that which I say," he continued, his back still toward her. "I am ver' strange." Every movement of his body suggested weariness. "I am two men, alway two," he added,

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almost under his breath, as if he were speaking to himself. "The blood that boil an' hate; the blood that think an' love."

Nini's heart sank when he turned from her. For a moment she had yearned for something, she knew not what, nor why, nor how. She knew only the fierce desire that left her trembling. Now she dropped back to the empty world. She was almost ashamed of the moment's exaltation. She tried to put it aside, to meet the man's changed mood. And as she spoke, she felt, with a throb of joy, that she was older, wiser, more capable of helping him.

"Everybody is like that," she said with quiet assurance. "Often, lately, I've hardly recognized myself. I seem to be different. Everybody is like that, who lives." She stopped, almost frightened at her own words.

Dan Smith scarcely heard her. He had been throwing his traps together feverishly. As he scraped his palette he stopped short, looking vacantly at the brown distances below.

"One can not know," he muttered to himself, oblivious of her presence. He became agitated

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again, vigilant, his eyes bright. "But he is ver' trouble' when I speak of that which he cut down when he is young."

Nini watched him anxiously. She knew that the words were not meant for her.

"An' you see," he went on, arguing with himself, "how he not wish to hear when I speak of that which he paint." He gave way to a delirium of savage fury.

"Ah," he growled, his voice harsh, almost guttural. "It is not necessary that one is fair to him." His mind reverted to the Indian. "The tree. It is good." He jerked back his head with hoarse, hysterical glee. The laughter trailed off in raucous breathing. Reaction came over him. He threw himself upon his camp-stool, and buried his face in his hands, his body shaking with dry sobs.

Nini half ran shyly to him. She let one hand rest upon his shoulder.

"What is it, M'sieu?" she pleaded. Her eyes were misty for his suffering and her own helplessness. "I do not understand. I've tried and I can't."

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Slowly the rocking shoulders quieted under her touch. His hand groped for hers and grasped it roughly, as a drowning man seizes madly a rescuing arm.

"It is something about M'sieu," she went on, the words coming to her as by a miracle. "Oh, I cannot tell you how good he is, M'sieu. He is like a father to me. He is like a father to everybody—even to Pierre." She spoke the name with doubt, almost dread. "And Pierre hates him, M'sieu. I have seen it. I am sure of it." The pressure upon her hand lessened. "M'sieu is just the same with you. He likes you. I have seen that, too. And you said that you liked him. I can't understand."

Dan Smith straightened up. He was outwardly calm again.

"Lak a father," he repeated, looking at her so steadily that she was confused, and feared lest he feel in the hand he still held the exquisite thrill in her veins.

"Yes," he affirmed. "I lak him." He closed his eyes miserably. "I confess it." When he opened them their glance rested fondly upon the

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loose bronze wealth of her hair. "You are the best friend I have ever in the world." Then, as the happy flush reddened her cheek, he dropped her hand. "I go now," he said.

A moment later, as if he wished to be alone, he gave her the canvas to carry to the house, and she set out tardily. She had gone only a few steps, however, when he called to her. She stopped, and with a few rapid strides he was at her side.

"Tell M'sieu," he charged her, his face inscrutable, "I say he must watch the tree here. Perhaps, one day, soon, they burn, you see? You tell M'sieu — nobody else."

"I will tell him, M'sieu."

"Merci," the artist ended cryptically.

Nini walked on into the woods. To her quickened imagination the staunch, friendly trees she had loved were already threatening. She brushed by them as if they were something hostile.

Dan Smith bundled easel and brushes, palette and box across to where The Wind stood waiting. As he did so his eyes wandered to the slender figure winding its way into the upland woods; and,

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long after he lost the outline of her, he caught glimpses of the red of her skirt flashing through the brown depths of the forest. The tenderness died on his face. The old torment took its place, and with it the old indecision. He hurried back to the path.

"Nini," he called, and waited. There was no reply. He called again and again. His fists doubled in impotent anger at himself.

"I warn him," he muttered. "I am a fool, a madman."

He retraced his steps, and loosened the big bay. His eyes grew wistful, as he stroked the silky neck. His shoulders were bent as if by a new weariness, a new hopelessness.

"I love her," he whispered.

Franchette observed Nini that afternoon with concern. The girl seemed possessed, now feverishly gay, now sad and troubled. Once when the older woman came upon her, the real anxiety on her dreamy face disquieted good-hearted, inquisitive Franchette. That night, when they were preparing for bed, she could stand it no longer.

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"M'sieu is not wise to have you go with the handsome stranger when he paints," she grumbled. "It is bad for you, bad for you."

Nini was gazing with unwonted interest and pleasure at the comely arms and neck reflected in the mirror.

"Why is it bad, Franchette?" She smiled patiently at the other's ignorance.

Franchette delayed her reply. She felt the transformation in the girl. Almost in a day the innocent, clinging girl had become a woman, an individual force. Nor had Franchette forgotten the girl's dream and its fulfillment, the strangeness of which had kindled all Franchette's innate superstition into a kind of reverence. But she realized also a difference in Nini's attitude toward her, and this irritated her.

"You think too much of him," she declared.

"I think of him all the time, whether I am with him or not, Franchette."

Franchette was disconcerted. But stern duty overcame her annoyance, her caution, everything. She felt that she must speak plainly, for the girl's sake.

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"I think only of you, Nini," she said, with well-meant aggressiveness. "Pretty soon the stranger will go away. You will see him again never. Then you will be sad, if you think of him too much."

This time Franchette's warning told. Nini had not thought of his going away. Suddenly she knew with quivering pain that he could not, must not leave her. Her face grew very white.

"I would follow him," she said through set lips.

Franchette inexorably paid no attention to the white, set face.

"But you cannot," she argued vigorously. "You cannot. He is a man, do you see? He is a man."

Nini listened perplexed, thinking rapidly. She remembered the inexplicable thrill she had felt when young M'sieu Thomas had seized her hand, had—yes, it was this that she had desired of him, of this other man, her great man, when he had started toward her. In the transport of that vivid moment, she had longed for his hand, for his embrace, for him, to yield herself to him. Her

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wide eyes, their brown depths stirred with trouble, questioned Franchette fearlessly.

"Is it right, Franchette," she asked, "for a man to touch my hand, to hold it, to put his arm about me — so?" She illustrated with a gesture.

Franchette threw up her hands in horror.

"*Le bon Dieu!*" she exclaimed. "No, unless he marries with you." She wrung her hands excitedly. "Oh, you poor child, you poor child."

Nini smiled again sunnily. Everything was all right again. She understood now. She would marry the stranger.

"It's all right, Franchette," she said happily, dancing across to the older woman, and catching at the wringing hands.

But Franchette shrunk away from her, as from something unclean. Long after the girl was asleep Franchette lay, wide awake, thinking.

"I must tell M'sieu," she decided at last.

CHAPTER V

"BRAVE LI'L' BROWN GIRL"

NINI was startled out of sound slumber by a jolting grasp that shook her shoulders. She saw, through filmy eyes, Franchette's unwieldy form standing over her. She glimpsed the morning light and felt, with sleepy intuition, that it was early.

"Oh, stop, Franchette," she murmured impatiently, thinking it was one of Franchette's pranks. "What time is it?" She curled up again drowsily.

Again Franchette shook her, and this time she added words that brought the girl bolt upright.

"Stop, is it?" cried Franchette, evidently panic-stricken. "When I am saving your life. The woods are afire. We shall all burn to death. Oh, *le bon Dieu*, burn to death, burn to death!"

Franchette, moaning and wringing her hands, was already bundling herself into her clothes, wob-

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bling back and forth from corner to corner aimlessly, occasionally picking up stray pieces of extra clothing which she piled upon the bed. Her rolling, sidewise gait was almost clownish. Nini, half awake, burst into laughter. Then, scenting the pungent odor of smoke, she flung off the covers, and ran to the window. She pushed it up, and dodged back as a black cloud of thick smoke billowed in her face. Choking, she clutched at the woodwork and slammed the window shut, stumbling back, blinded, to the middle of the room. She could hear now hoarse shouts of the men below.

"It is as he said," she whispered, when she found her breath. "I told M'sieu."

"As who said?" demanded the dismayed Franchette. Then, as Nini did not answer, she began another frenzied tour of the room. "Oh, we burn to death, we burn to death!"

Nini groped her way to her clothes and dressed rapidly, paying no attention to Franchette's groans and prayers. When she was ready, she found the door and unbolted it.

"I'm going down, Franchette," she called.

"Oh, I'm coming, Nini," wailed the woman.

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"Do not leave me. I shall burn to death. It is like rats in a trap. We cannot escape. We cannot escape."

Nini crossed quickly to the bed, and filled her arms with Franchette's crazily collected belongings.

"Come on, Franchette," she commanded. "I have everything."

She opened the door and ran down the stairs, Franchette laboring after her, mumbling and crossing herself.

Below, the air was clearer. Nini pulled open the outer door almost in the face of young M'sieu Thomas. The boy's face shone as he saw her.

"I came after you," he said, braver now that she was looking. "You run down to the lake. You'll be safe there. We've got the hose working. Pierre's going to keep the house wet. I'm going to fight the fire with the others." He shouted the details with conscious pride. Then, on his mettle, he bolted to the path and disappeared in the woods, by the way which Mr. Huntworth and Mr. Thomas had already taken.

Nini saw above her the heavy, moving curtain

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of smoke, borne on by the strong wind, sway and curl about the upper windows. From under the northern sky, glowing with unnatural, flickering, ruddy light, she could hear the distant crackling and snapping of the fire. She darted across the clearing to the knoll, passing on her way Pierre, who, fingering the dry nozzle of the hose, leered up at her as she hurried by. The valley below was comparatively bare of smoke, for the wind was in the northeast, blowing steadily, inexorably, straight from the burning area toward the house. The day had scarcely dawned. Behind the eastern ridge, beyond the lake, the sun gleamed through a soft roseate flush which tinted the vagrant, feathery clouds with peaceful light.

Nini was held motionless by the contrast. It was not different from yesterday's dawn, nor from that of many a tranquil day that had passed. But now the benign morning light uncovered this unaccountable, menacing holocaust which the stranger had foretold. She looked down along the right bank. Somewhere among the green was the little cabin. Her heart leaped at the knowledge that he at least was safe. She turned back.

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Not for a moment did she consider going down to the lake, as young M'sieu Thomas had bade her. As she came to the house she found Franchette and Pierre standing over the hose.

"Water-no come," Pierre said sardonically.

Franchette's courage had returned to her, once she was in the open.

"Not come?" she demanded scornfully, snatching the nozzle. "See," she cried, a few seconds later, with a contemptuous sniff. "It is wrong. He is Indian. He knows nothing. Certainly it will not come. It is all turned around."

Pierre reached forward wrathfully to stop her, but the big woman threw him off. After a moment's twisting and screwing, the pent-up water spurted forth. Franchette pointed the nozzle at the low roof, and dragged the hose nearer, until the stream reached the top and poured down the slanting sides. Then she settled herself solidly, her feet apart.

"I do this," she declared, with a vigorous jerk of her head. "The Indian man, he can go to the kitchen and get the breakfast," she snorted with scoffing laughter.

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"Good for you, Franchette," Nini caught the woman's aggressive spirit. She saw Pierre's evil scowl and his working fingers. "Come with me, Pierre. We'll help them stop the fire." She sped toward the forest. At the beginning of the path she turned. Pierre was following sullenly. She beckoned to him, and hastened on. At the spring she waited for him. Many minutes passed, and no Pierre appeared. She drank at the spring and plunged on deeper into the forest, keeping to the brook. Her old distrust of the Indian was renewed. He had used the hose before, often. He had never made a mistake with it before. He had sneered over its failure. He had been displeased when Franchette had made it right. But soon she forgot Pierre, Franchette, the house, everything, in the terror of the fire itself. For the first time now she began to realize the horror of it, its untamable might, its trampling, inevitable power. She halted now and then in its denser smoke that stifled her. She covered her ears to dull the nearer dry, crackling sound that seemed to her the sobbing throes of the great trees in its killing embrace. She felt its hot breath and was

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conscious of her own littleness, her aloneness. It grew to be a pitiless monster, and in her heart she wished herself back in the clearing. She even missed the trickling of the brook which she had left at the bend, whence it flowed downward toward the lake. But some purpose led her on steadily, to what end she knew not, her face to the fire, going to meet it. Somewhere beyond, M'sieu and the others were fighting it. A fervent desire to help drove her forward the faster. At last she heard voices just ahead of her, shouting, answering, and she came out into a narrow strip of cleared ground, beyond which, half hidden in the murky smoke, the pines began again.

For a moment she recoiled before the blistering heat in the open, and she gave a little cry of consternation as she saw the red blaze, which made the farther woods a great advancing torch of flame. The black rushing cloud above her was spangled with sparks now, and the crackle of the burning forest was almost deafening. Part way across the little clearing she saw, through thin, smoky haze, the form of a man. The lonely terror left her, and she hurried forward. It was

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M'sieu Huntworth leaning over a hastily dug trench. He was crouched low to escape the heavier smoke, and was staring straight ahead to where the heavens and the tree-tops met in a swaying band of scarlet, dull behind the black. He did not notice Nini until he turned to measure, for the tenth time, the distance to the stretch of pine trees, his loved pine trees, that would make a straight track for the raging torrent of flame to the house. Even then he scarcely heeded her. His determined face was scarred with bitterness and anguish. His jaw was set with concentrated will power. He had the look of a fighting man who would win, or die in the losing. He motioned to her as if he were trying to put her from him.

"Go back," he shouted hoarsely. "Go back."

Again he faced the flaring north, his mind busy, calculating distances, gauging the moment for his final stand against the rioting chaos of flame.

"Where is M'sieu Thomas?" cried Nini, coming close to him.

He pointed ahead, toward the doomed forest.

"Beating out the sparks," he yelled in her ear. Then as if he realized again the presence of the

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girl. "Go back," he ordered her. "Down to the lake. Go back."

But the red of the flame had stirred the red in Nini's blood. In her simplicity she sensed no personal danger, only the tremendous power of the sweeping flame, and the littleness of the few who were opposing it. She crept forward, breathing the lower air, until she was almost at the edge of the woods. Her ear caught a beating, swishing sound at her right, and, obscurely, she saw two forms threshing at the underbrush. A shower of sparks fell almost at her feet. Eager to help, she picked up a light branch, and began to lash at them energetically. Beyond, more sparks were ripping through the upper branches, and she pressed forward, beating as she went.

She had forgotten the two men at her right and M'sieu Huntworth, squatting at the trench behind her. The little dots of light fascinated her, and she fought at them, her bronze hair loose and waving, her breast heaving, her parched lips smiling. The denser glowing rain enticed her, unconscious, deeper into the forest, nearer to the fast oncoming fire, farther from the help of the three men whose

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faces, minds and bodies were concentrated upon their unequal contest. A flaming brand splashed heavily upon the ground before her, spattering fiery spray upon the edge of her skirt. The momentary peril admonished her of her rashness. Everywhere about her was the impenetrable forest, an army of specters in the writhing smoke, and on every side fell fitfully the vicious sparks. At her left, a little tongue of flame licked its way along the base of a huge trunk, and darted venomously toward her. She stepped backward, almost into the red embers of the brand. She was lost in the burning forest.

Nini tried to think how she had come, and in what direction the clearing should be. The sky was red wherever she could see, and the noise of the flames seemed to come from every point to which she turned. Even then she had no fear. She closed her eyes for a moment to hide the glare, to think more clearly. Then, half dazed, she opened them as she heard a voice singing. To her, standing in the midst of the burning woods it seemed unreal, a dream. But no, it was a human voice, a gay voice that stopped now and then in

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a cough, and then took up the refrain once more, as if in wilful challenge of flame and smoke. Whirling to the left she saw a tall figure, silhouetted against a new sluggish light in the underbrush which gave her at once the direction of the advancing fire. The tall figure was backing slowly toward her, facing the red wall beyond, its long arms beating like flails in time to the melody:

"J'aime très bien ma chère amie

Tra lala la-la-la-la-la.

Elle est une belle sans jalousie

Tra lala la-la-la-la-la.

Tra lala la-la-la-la-la-la

Tra lala la-la-la-la-la."

Nini could distinguish the words now. She could see, in the spurts of light, the red handkerchief bound about the graceful neck. She gave a little cry of dread. For the first time that morning she was afraid. She ran forward stumblingly, and caught at the stranger's arm. Dan Smith swung about with surprise. His face and neck were begrimed with smoke, but his eyes were like dancing fire-sprites.

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"Nini!" he cried, in reckless welcome. "It is a gret beeg fire, *n'est ce pas?* He drive me long time, a mile, I think. Ah," he shouted in a sudden flare of light. "He wink at me, an' the more I strike at him the more he wink. We are but chil'ren, *ma cherie*. We cannot stop him. Never, never, never."

He seized Nini's arm, and dragged her back a few steps. She saw that his shirt was torn and marked with gaping, blackened holes, and she tried to pull him onward, toward the open. A blazing branch came hurtling down, straight at the girl's head. His stick whirled through the air unerringly, and knocked it, splintering, aside.

"Ha," he muttered. "Now he shake his finger. Hear him laugh at us. He wish not us, only tree, an' he get them. We are but chil'ren with a tooth pick."

"Come," urged Nini breathlessly, tugging at his arm. "Come, M'sieu, come quickly."

Dan Smith's face grew tender, as he looked down at her.

"Yes, I come," he said. "It is not the place for my li'l' brown girl. But have no fear, Nini."

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Dan Smith tak care of you." He took a last look at the flames. "But I fight him long time," he cried. "It is difficul' to stop. He can tell you. I fight him when he is small. I think I can kill him. But he grow ver' beeg, an' laugh at me. He is ver' wicked, that fire there."

He shook his fist in boyish vexation, at the vanquishing flame.

"*Eh bien.*" He grasped Nini's hand, and together they hurried on, their path traced for them by the firelight which drowned the brightness of the morning sun. Like two children, hand in hand, each brushing spiteful sparks from the other's clothing, they came to the smoke-dimmed clearing.

As they passed the last ragged row of trees, bending forward in the breeze as if straining to escape inevitable doom, a low exclamation came from the artist's lips. His arm circled Nini's waist and hurried her on more rapidly. Before them, seen dimly, was a long, sputtering line of flame, leaping, it seemed, from the earth. From it a whiter smoke rose in eddying currents, and mingled with the black stream above.

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"Back fire," muttered Dan Smith. Almost as he spoke they were upon it. His arm tightened and lifted her. They were almost treading the burning grass as they jumped. They landed on the blackened earth, half tripping at the shallow ditch. Here, their way was blocked by a robust, bending figure, whose bloodshot eyes were staring above at the flaming tree-tops and the glowing sky. Mr. Huntworth retreated before them amazed, as if he could not believe his eyes. He laid hold of Nini's arm to make certain.

"I thought you went back," he yelled. In the unnatural light, there was a desperate look on his stern face, as he glanced quickly at Dan Smith. His eyes lifted once more to the flaming forest. It was no time for astonishment or question. He motioned them back toward the farther pines which swayed and glistened in the whirling smoke, and Dan Smith impelled the girl onward, obeying instantly the commanding gesture. Mr. Huntworth remained where he was, behind his feeble, defending line of back fire.

When they reached the woods the artist loosened his grasp on the girl's waist. He smiled

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jaunty courage down into her eyes, and his voice, though merry, was commanding.

"Now, *ma belle* Nini, it is time for you to run," he cried, nodding along the edge of the forest toward where, lost in the cloudy distances, he knew was the lake and safety. "See," he added, with a wave of his hand toward the seething caldron from which they had come. "The fire dragon he grow more beeg the more he eat. He grow more angry the more he drink. He swallow ever'thing that is in his path. Follow the tree, li'l' brown girl, an' stop never until you come to the water. There you are safe, you see?"

He bent toward her that she might catch the words above the clamor of the flames. His face was very near to hers. Nini looked up at him with direct, fearless gaze.

"And you, M'sieu?" she asked.

"I?" he shouted lightly, "Oh, I stay an' help M'sieu to fight him." Then, seeing her anxiety, "An, by 'n' bye, I turn an' run lak a cower', till I am safe."

Nini shook her head.

"I'll stay here," she said.

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Fierce gladness lighted Dan Smith's face for an instant. Then he grew very sober.

"No, Nini," he said. "You mus' go now."

But Nini was determined.

"I'll stay here with you," she said. "M'sieu will stop the fire."

Dan Smith looked back across the open. He lifted his head, and the wind ruffled his straight, silky hair.

"The fire dragon not dirty his toe in the black — underneath," he said, doubtfully. "He kick at it hard, an' he tak a ver' long jump in the air. He lan' here, Nini, an' we mus' run fas' to get away."

Her answering gaze, however, was unswerving, unmoved. At last he surrendered, and smiled down at her admiringly.

"*Eh bien*, but it is a brave girl," he cried. "Rest here — no other place. I come for you."

With that he dashed off through the smoke to where they had left Mr. Huntworth.

Left alone Nini stared across at the surging panorama of smoke and flame and glow. Already the fire was almost at the edge of the clearing.

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As far as she could see, it seemed to charge forward like a myriad, massive, avenging host from heaven itself. The pigmy line of earth fire, which ran forward nimbly to meet it, under its thin banner of smoke seemed terrifyingly weak before the irresistible giant force of the sweeping flame. The fire dragon he had called it, she suddenly remembered. Instantly her childlike imagination reverted to his idea. She saw it loom and leer, a hundred feet high; its million bloodshot eyes opening, shutting, twinkling, flashing; its raucous breathing sharpening now and then into hoarse, choking chuckles of fiendish delight; its gaping, fiery jaws belching forth smoke that rolled up like spume on the dark cloud above; and, below, where once had stretched the cool depths of woodland, its horrid black body, hideously woven of murky cloud and glowing scales of fire, sprawled, spreading out a thousand tentacles voraciously to feed its increasing maw.

Nini shuddered and closed her smarting eyes. She covered her ears to abate the ceaseless dinning of its laughter, which had become a crackling thunder. She crouched down, breathing in short

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gasps, for the air was growing thicker. She tried to say a prayer, and instinctively the prayer was for him, lost somewhere in that moving veil that billowed towards her across the clearing. He would come for her, he had said. The repeated assurance calmed her. She opened her eyes again upon the chaos that had once been a beautiful world.

As she looked his prophecy came true. The monster seemed to lurch forward with a rush to meet the back fire. Then it seemed to back off with an echoing growl. It leaped up the last line of shaking trees. A very avalanche of sparks whirled across and downward, showering thickly about the crouching girl. Somewhere before her she seemed to hear his voice, and it was singing. Then, with a low cry, she saw, far at her right, in the pine woods at the edge of which she stood, the fatal glare cutting off her escape. For an instant she would not believe it, for, all about her, the hot trees were untouched, save where sparks clung and glowered and died. But the glare increased in size and in intensity. The woods were afire. A sudden mad impulse to escape almost overpowered

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the girl, but, shutting her teeth, she crept closer to the huge pine by which the stranger had told her to wait, comforted by the touch of its shaggy bark, her eyes peering, peering straight ahead to pierce the dingy curtain that seemed to engulf and smother her. Her head buzzed with fatigue and suffocation. She felt that the flames at her right were nearer, behind her. She dared not look, for fear the sight of it would numb her last atom of courage.

Suddenly she laughed, sharply, hysterically. Two forms whirled the curtain aside for a second, and dashed through its closing folds. Nini had time only to see the tall, expected figure, bent as by the weight of a broader, heavier form. They were upon her. Dan Smith caught her arm with his free hand, and pulled her on. And so they plunged, stumbling, slipping into the thick woods, where the smoke hid the abattis of lower branches and underbrush. Sometimes the artist well-nigh dragged her down under the lunging weight of two. Again he lifted her, with indomitable strength, over stumps and fallen trees. And, invariably, the glare raced with them — at her left

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it was now — a blur of palpitating red and yellow that streaked above them and suffused with burning light the blotting blackness, and withered their flesh with its shriveling heat. Nini was beginning to flag, when the hand that held her forced her down and forward with mastering pressure. Nini felt cool water swirl about her limbs and splash against her fevered cheeks. For a second it seemed to her as if the heavens had snatched her up into their blue depths. She buried her head under the surface, and, coming up, she let the ripples play about her parched lips. Her blood rioted in her veins. Her heart thumped less rapidly. And she saw the brook, a weird lane of reflected light, wind on below and disappear behind the saffron wall of smoke.

"Ha, it is better." Then, "Nini," he called, bending over her. Suddenly he jerked himself upright. They heard a wild, triumphant whoop, and a dark shape rushed past them, coming from the direction of the flames. Nini became aware that M'sieu Huntworth was trying to labor to his feet. He strove to shout, defiantly it seemed, but they heard only a fading groan. His body relaxed

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and Dan Smith sprang forward, throwing a supporting arm about him.

"Nini," he cried. The girl crept forward, his call stinging her to action. He pulled her nearer until his face, fierce with determination, was close to hers. "The li'l' brown girl mus' be strong now," he said. "She mus' help Dan Smith carry M'sieu. He is limp lak a rag. He is ver' heavy. Li'l' brown girl, she is brave?" His blue eyes questioned her.

"I will try," she answered. The look he gave her was an added spur to her. She helped him dash water into M'sieu's face. A second later they were on their feet, M'sieu between them. The water had partly revived him, and he rolled his head from one to the other, staring at them with glazed eyes. Their arms crossed under his shoulders, and toilsomely they moved on, back toward the fire they had temporarily outdistanced. Soon they came to the bend of the stream and, following its course, they started to cut daringly athwart the track of the approaching flame, in its very teeth. Nini felt the sizzling heat. She did not understand that he had chosen intrepidly their

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nearest, surest way to safety, but she trusted him implicitly. She heard the fierce onrush of the surging flames. Her eyes ached in the smoke. But she had glimpses, now and then, of Dan Smith's outline on the other side of M'sieu. And she forgot the tugging pain of her slender muscles, in the firm grasp of the artist's directing arm over hers.

Sometimes they crowded along in the bed of the brook, the cold water lapping about their ankles and legs, and making the heat of their bodies almost unbearable. Again they were tripping over roots on the bank, slipping on the dry pine needles, instinctively dodging boulders which they could not see. Nini felt the burden of her skirt, twisting heavily about her legs, and knew, with an inward smile, that always she was nearest to the water, the first to wade into its cooling stream. She grew very tired, and they stopped more often for a few seconds' rest. Then on they went again, impelled, it seemed to her, by the strength of a single arm.

Gradually Nini's sight and mind grew hazy, her limbs numb. It became automatic, endless,

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aimless; this never ceasing, stumbling, halting, gasping race past desolate trees, which seemed to rain down fire upon their heads, and hemmed them in with dancing circles of changing light. The smoke seemed to grow thinner at last and the heat less intense. M'sieu grew heavier and heavier, until her arms seemed dragged in slow torture from their sockets. The world became a medley of tangled thickets, of prostrate tree trunks, of slippery, moss-covered rocks; of water, now ankle deep, now knee deep; of treacherous stones on which she would have tumbled, had not that firm, untiring arm clasped hers across M'sieu's back. Then finally she saw a strangely real radiance that seemed like sunlight far ahead, and she strained onward toward it as toward a goal. Then the edge of the woods drifted past her, and she seemed to see, stupidly, a dry, dusty roadway, a sloping bank and the blue waters of the lake. And she wondered vaguely what time it was. It occurred to her that she was hungry. Then the strong grasp loosened, and she forgot blissfully all about it.

Some time afterward she felt cool, wet hands

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chafing her wrists. She sighed deeply, and opened her eyes. Young M'sieu Thomas was bending over her. He gave a low shout now, and his fingers slipped down from her wrists and enfolded her hands.

"You're all right now, Nini," he said, cheerfully. "We're down by the lake. But why didn't you tell me you were there?" He grew reproachful. "I wish I had known. I wish I could have saved you."

Nini drew her hands away. She remembered what Franchette had said. Then, with an effort, she raised herself on her arm and looked about her. She was lying in the grass by the side of the road. Across on the other side, nearer the lake, two men bent over a prostrate form. It all came back to her now. That was M'sieu. One of the others was M'sieu Thomas, and the other — he had turned at young M'sieu Thomas's shout. His face was almost unrecognizable through its spotted grime. The knotted handkerchief was almost a char above a tattered, burned shirt that once had been blue. But his smile broke through all disfigurements. Her answering smile was wan but content. She

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felt herself weaken, and she sank back with happy tears in her eyes. She heard his step.

"She is ver' brave," he said, looking down at her, over young M'sieu Thomas's shoulder. "She tak him in her arm, an' we carry him lak he is a chil'."

She saw through a mist that young M'sieu Thomas had made room for him beside her. She heard a muttered word, and saw that young M'sieu Thomas was moving away, hesitatingly, unwillingly, toward the silent pair on the other side of the road. She shut her eyes quickly. Then she felt his hand softly upon her brow, smoothing back her hair with gentle, reverential touch.

"Li'l' brown girl," he whispered. "My brave li'l' brown girl."

"Oh, no, M'sieu," she said denyingly, opening her eyes. "It was all you."

For answer he only looked at her, shaking his head slowly, and Nini, with wide, wet eyes fixed on his, let that look flood her and thrill her with wild joy. Then slowly he looked away toward the forest.

"BRAVE LI'L' BROWN GIRL"

"The spring an' the two beeg tree, they are safe," he said quietly.

The words aroused Nini from a wonderful dream.

"Safe?" she queried, incredulous. It had seemed to her that the world, except the little bit of roadway and lake shore, must have been devoured by that fiery monster from which, as by a miracle, they had escaped.

"*Oui*, an' the beeg house of M'sieu, it is safe, also." Then, assuming his old bantering tone, "The win' an' the fire they quarrel, you see?" he said. "An' the win' turn an' fight with him, an' then it whistle for the rain, an' that come also."

Following his upward glance Nini noticed for the first time that the sun had disappeared behind leaden clouds. She felt the rain in the air.

"And the fire, M'sieu?" she asked. She would hardly have believed it all if he had not told her.

"The win' it drive him away to the setting sun."

He put an arm about her and lifted her to her feet, and she saw that he steadied her with an effort. His shoulders were sagging, and his face

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seemed thin and drawn. She summoned all her will-power, and stood erect, hiding her weakness.

"I am strong now," she declared. "But you are tired, M'sieu. You must rest." She let her hand linger upon his arm with fond concern. Then, "I'll go to M'sieu," she said, surprising herself with the promptness of her decision.

Dan Smith walked beside her across the road, his keen eyes guarding her every movement, his arm ready to help her. But she went forward easily, self-reliantly to the reclining form of M'sieu, and knelt beside him. The artist stood by, listening as she questioned the older Thomas, and watching her first simple ministrations. Then he beckoned to Young Thomas who stood at one side, idle, frowning at his own inability to help.

"*Eh bien*, my frien'," he said. "A horse it have four good laig an' M'sieu he have two bad laig. It rain soon, also. We go to the beeg house an' bring a horse for him, is it not so?"

Young Thomas agreed gladly. Together they set off up the roadway, the boy talking excitedly of the fire, the artist laconic, lagging behind the other's rapid pace. They climbed the incline to-

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ward the house, and saw the fitful glow of the distant fire upon its slanting shingles. From the knoll they could see the black clouds racing to westward under the darkening sky.

As they advanced across the clearing Young Thomas balked with surprise. There, beside the house, stood the busy town of Franchette, still directing the thin stream from the hose upon the roof.

"Where's Pierre?" he called.

Franchette acted as if she did not hear him. She redoubled her efforts with the hose, playing the water up and down with greater zeal.

"I do this," she cried proudly, as they came up beside her. "I stay here. It was very hot once, but I stay."

"It's all right now, Franchette." Young Thomas spoke with patronizing carelessness. "You needn't have done it so long. But where's Pierre?"

Franchette had dropped the hose as she caught sight of Dan Smith. Her eyes traveled rapidly over his blackened face, his burned clothes. Her pride left her.

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"Indian man came back a little time ago. He told me to run away," she said. "He said I would be burned. Then he sulked when I stay. But, you are hurt, M'sieu," this to Dan Smith. "It must be a terrible fire. I do nothing," she added in quick self-abasement.

"No," said Dan Smith, with smiling assurance. "P'raps you save the house. You cannot know."

As they were speaking Pierre came stealthily along the side of the house.

"Here he is now," said Young Thomas. "Bring Mr. Huntworth's horse, Pierre," he called.

But the Indian did not heed him. His suspicious eyes were interrogating the artist.

"M'sieu?" The peremptory word hissed with impatience.

"He is safe," said Dan Smith. His tall body reeled slightly. He groped out with one hand, propping himself against the side of the house. He turned to Young Thomas with a pitiful attempt at a smile.

"My frien' can tak the horse to M'sieu," he said, throwing back his head with an effort. "I think I go home now —" he faltered, bracing himself jauntily — "before the rain commence."

CHAPTER VI

THE CASTLE OF LOVE

ALL that afternoon the rain poured upon the roof of the little cabin on the south shore of the lake, as if to soothe the sleep of the man who lay upon the narrow bunk, stupefied with exhaustion. All that afternoon the rain, with its rhythmic tattoo on the shingles of the big house, warmed the hearts of those within with a new, rare gratitude for mere shelter and for life itself. All that afternoon the rain, with its millions of hammering drops, battered at the shivering, dying fire, and deadened the heat of the blackened waste.

Toward nightfall, its work done, the downpour slackened, and soon the beaded trees were jeweled in the light of a red sunset, that streamed across the western sky. When the rain stopped Nini issued from the kitchen door with a basket, a huge basket loaded to the brim. While the others had been resting, big-hearted Franchette had been busy over the stove, and Nini, as she hurried down the

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hillside, felt the warmth of freshly cooked things beneath her arm, and sniffed dainty, appetizing odors that steamed up from under the white, covering cloths. The girl, with unwonted demonstrativeness, had thrown her arms around the big woman's neck, when Franchette had insisted that this basket should go to the strange M'sieu, who was so brave and so tired and so alone. And Franchette had beamed at Nini and, a moment later, behind the girl's vanishing back, had shaken her head doubtfully, and had muttered imprecations upon her own foolishness. She had not told M'sieu, as she had sworn to herself she would. Her self-scoffing changed to sheepishness. After all, he was a fine, brave, handsome fellow, that stranger.

The big bay whinnied sociably when Nini came to the cabin, but this was the only sound that greeted her. She stole on her tiptoes to the open doorway. For a moment she watched, with a brooding, motherly smile, the tall form flat upon the bunk. She stifled her desire to go to him, to sit down beside him, to note his deep breathing, to feel his nearness. Noiselessly she put down the

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basket just inside the door, and turned away, disappointed but glad that she could serve him, glad for his rest, glad that she had seen him, glad for all the little things that strangely satisfy a heart that loves.

"Nini."

The girl whirled about, smothering the cry of joy that was in her throat at the sound of his sleepy voice.

"Yes, M'sieu."

She was at his side before he could rise.

"What is it, Nini?" He opened his eyes wide, as if he was trying to shake the heaviness from the reddened lids.

"Oh, I am so sorry, M'sieu. I did not mean to waken you. You are very tired. Can't you sleep again — now? I will go away." She spoke solicitously, but the last sentence dragged as she forced it from her lips.

"No." His blinking glance sought the doorway, and the corner of the basket that was outlined in the light. "Li'l brown girl," he demanded, eying her with jocular severity. "The basket, what is in the basket?"

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"Oh, that is Franchette's work," she said shyly. "She cooked them this afternoon, and made me bring them to you. She says you are a brave man, M'sieu," she added with swift pride.

"M'sieu — M'sieu Huntworth — he know you bring them to me?" he asked with a darkening look.

"No, but he will be glad when we tell him about it," she assured him, confidently. "He thinks you are very brave, too. He said to-day that it is twice now that you have saved his life."

Dan Smith raised himself upon his hand.

"I save his life, his life, twice," he repeated vacantly. Then he flung back his head as if he were facing an accuser. "No," he declared vehemently. "It is not true."

"Oh, yes, it is, M'sieu," Nini contradicted. "And," she added, her admiration and pride plainly evident, "M'sieu thinks it is very remarkable that you could warn him one day, and that the fire came the next. And so do I."

Dan Smith smiled at her innocence.

"M'sieu talked with Pierre this afternoon for a long while," she went on, her brow puckering.

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"Pierre is queer. Yesterday he said he hoped there would never be a fire, and to-day he did nothing to stop it. I do not understand Pierre. Sometimes I am sure he wishes M'sieu ill. I could hate him for that," she added with ardent loyalty. Then, seeing the dejected slope of the artist's shoulders, she blamed herself. "But I weary you, M'sieu. I am a very foolish girl. Forgive me, M'sieu."

Dan Smith gazed long at her anxious face. Tenderness, pain and determination made the expression of his eyes, of his mouth and of his set chin at total variance with each other. He was fighting with his heart, and was winning that fight against grievous odds.

"You, you hate a man who wish ill to M'sieu?" he repeated. "Nini," he went on with vigorous austerity. "You think I am a good man?"

"Oh, M'sieu." Nini would have laughed if he had not been so stern. Conviction shone in her eyes. "I think you are the best man in the world."

"It is not so," he said. "I am ver' bad. If you know ever'thing you hate me. You hate me, I say. You comprehen'?"

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Nini was mystified, but she smiled at the absurdity of it.

"Oh, no, M'sieu." The certainty in her tone made the man falter. Then,

"You think I am a brave man, Nini?" he asked relentlessly.

"You know that, M'sieu," she said, sobered by his insistence. "I have never known so brave a man."

"I am a coward. I love an' I run away. I hate an' I run away. I fight — only myself."

The galling bitterness of his last sentence dismayed Nini.

"Why do you talk so, M'sieu?" she implored. "It is not true. None of it is true."

"You think I am kin', is it not so, Nini?" he asked again, unsparing.

"I know you are kind, M'sieu." She spoke with troubled emphasis. "M'sieu is very kind, but you are even kinder than he."

"I am not kin'. I am cruel, harsh, bitter. I am —"

"Oh, I will not listen, M'sieu." The girl sprang to her feet, quick tears in her eyes. "It hurts

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me so. Oh, you do not know how it hurts me."

Dan Smith stretched forth his hand with an impulsive gesture, until it touched her arm. Then he drew it back sharply.

"It is bes'," he muttered. He sank back and lay, his head upon his arm, watching her. "You can go now, Nini," he said. "I think — I can sleep."

He turned to the wall, unable to endure the sight of her tear-wet face. Nini delayed in sorrowful doubt.

"I hope you rest well, M'sieu," she said wistfully. He did not stir, and she moved away. On the threshold she paused.

"Will you come in the morning to paint, M'sieu?" she asked. "I know that M'sieu Huntworth would wish it."

"Yes, I come."

All night Dan Smith tossed restlessly upon the balsam bunk. Once he rose, fumbling at his breast, and, going to the table, he lighted a match for a glimpse at the face painted on the birch-bark. And his features, in the momentary light, were swart, glum, callous. He glided back to the bunk

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with stealthy steps. But, there in the dark, another face, more real, tear-wet and appealing, obliterated that of the picture. He rolled fitfully from one side to the other of the bunk. Once he cried out, half dreaming, for it seemed to him that, from one side, the kindly blue eyes of M'sieu looked at him, while on the other crouched the scowling Indian. And behind the Indian, stood a slender, barbaric form, pointing her finger inexorably at the man who had been his friend, whose life he had twice saved. Toward morning, brain and body wearied by the ceaseless struggle, he fell asleep. The sun was high when he awoke.

The moment he was on his feet, he realized his intense hunger. He had not tasted food since the night before the fire. He brought the basket to the table, and pulled aside the snowy cloths. Then he saw Mr. Huntworth's name scratched upon the handle, and he did not disturb the contents. Soon he was building a fire outside, and cooking his own crude breakfast. When he had eaten, he mended the holes in the blue shirt, his long, sinewy arms glistening in the sunlight. This done, he stood for some moments engrossed in

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thought. Then he strode to the hemlock tree and loosened the big bay, talking meanwhile under his breath.

"I think for a moment, *Le Vent*, p'raps I jump on your back an' ride away quick. Never return here again. But it is not possible, *Le Vent*. The fate it bin' me here. P'raps it is she, Gleam o' Dawn, who lead me, as he think. Who knows?" He vaulted upon the bay's back. "Come, we go paint," he cried, tossing his head. "We go see the tree that M'sieu love." His lips curled with scorn. "No, no, Dan Smith," he cried again, with forced laughter that echoed back to him from all sides, like the cries of a hundred tortured souls. "We forget. We laugh. We sing.

*"J'aime très bien ma chere amie
Tra lala la-la-la-la-la."*

The song startled the squirrels, who ran, chattering, to the upper branches of the trees, and cocked their heads to look down at the singular man who sang between clenched teeth, and whose face was haggard. The artist came to the road, and spurred the bay up the incline, and over the knoll still

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singing lustily. "*Tra lala la-la —*" The refrain broke off suddenly as he saw three or four strange men lounging near the veranda, smoking. They eyed him with casual interest as he came closer.

"*Bon jour,*" he called. "M'sieu Huntworth, where is he?"

Each of the group looked to the others without a word. After a moment a huge, broad-shouldered giant of a man came forward. M'sieu Huntworth, he informed the artist, in the patois of the border, was somewhere in the burned district to the north. He had been gone perhaps an hour. Dan Smith thanked him, and, wheeling the horse, rode to the path that led to the spring, perplexed at the unexpected appearance of strangers at the house of M'sieu.

Just within the cloaking trees the big bay balked and reared. A gnarled, knotted hand gripped the bridle, and the smirking face of the Indian appeared, of a sudden, beside the horse's head. So surreptitiously had he come, that Dan Smith was taken off his guard. But before Pierre could speak the artist leaned forward and tapped, with the tips of his fingers, the hand that held The

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Wind's bridle. It was a gesture of superiority, of mastery, of a prince to one of his people.

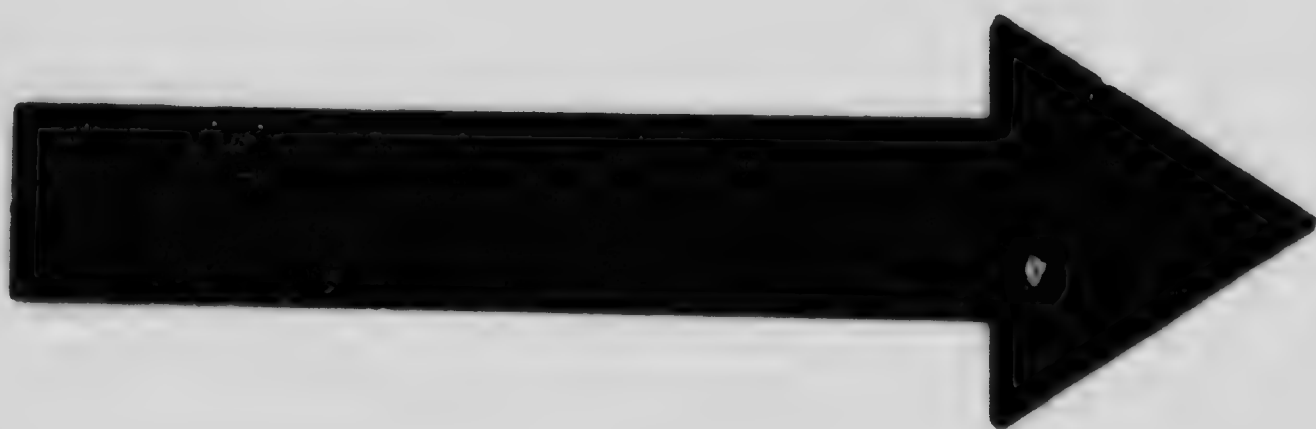
"Tak away your han', if you please," he commanded.

Sullenly the Indian obeyed. He edged nearer, however. And his skulking, fawning movement did not disguise his surly determination to arrest any attempt the artist might make to proceed on his way. Dan Smith had no notion of doing this, however. Instead, he settled back in the saddle, and, drawing himself up, he waited.

"Well, my frien'," he said.

"Son of Gleam o' Dawn — save — him, Blue Cloud. Why?"

"Because I wish it," Dan Smith answered pithily. Everything about him, his impassive face, the straight, unmoving body, added to the aloofness of his words. The effect upon the Indian was immediate. He became cunningly respectful. He bowed with grave dignity. No trace remained of the distrust, the resentment that had made his look vindictive. He waited in the attitude of one who listens for direction, rather than for explanation.



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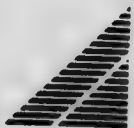
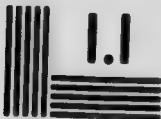
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"My frien' say the vengeance, it is for me," Dan Smith went on sententiously. "Then, see, he tak the fire in his han', an' spread it in the tree. I tell him no, an' I try to stop it. It is not fair fight. We stop the fire, I think. My frien' spread the fire again, behin' us." Few would have noticed the almost imperceptible start which discovery gave the Indian, but Dan Smith saw it. "I am ver' angry. My frien' listen not to that which I say."

The Indian bowed with assumed humility. Then, from beneath lowered eye-brows, he flashed a stealthy, upward glance at Dan Smith's face. He read nothing there, however.

"Red Feather — promise?" The guttural voice was grudgingly submissive, in its hidden question.

"I promise her, Gleam o' Dawn," said Dan Smith. "I keep the promise when she say to me, It is time."

Superstition illuminated for a second the wrinkled, copper-colored face. The Indian stepped back, and Dan Smith spoke to the big bay. He

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rode on leisurely, his form rigid, inflexible until he came to the turn. There he looked back over his shoulder. The Indian was still standing in the path, following him with half-credulous, suspicious eyes. Dan Smith drew rein, but the bent form had vanished instantly into the labyrinth of the forest. Beyond the turn Dan Smith leaned forward, his body quivering with reaction, his shoulders caving, his eyes half closed.

"Ah, *Le Vent*, is it true, that which I say?" he whispered. "I know not. I know not. The end, where is it? *Eh bien*," he added, shutting his teeth. "I sing.

*J'aime très bien ma chere amie
Tra lala la-la-la-la-la."*

And so, singing, he came to the spring, where, as if she were awaiting him, Nini sat exactly as he had placed her for the picture.

"Ah! *Bon jour*, Nini," he cried with a deep sigh of relief. "You are here. It is a good world."

"And you are singing, M'sieu," called Nini

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joyfully. "I heard you long before I saw you. And I laughed. Oh, M'sieu, I am so glad you are happy again."

The girl was on her feet and came, springing, to meet him, her face beaming. The artist, wrestling at the buckles that bound his traps to the saddle, heard the tender, joyous words that seemed to catch at his heart, and lift it madly to his throat. His soul, tortured by ceaseless conflict, starving for love, for sympathy, for all the wonderful human things his will had denied it, broke out now in wild revolt. The tension of the days that had passed, of that very morning, had weakened his resistance. And now, suddenly, the dam he had built within himself broke down, and the pent-up desire and passion rushed forth surgingly. He dropped his easel, and caught Nini's hands, and the touch of her tore away the last remaining atoms of control.

"Happy!" he cried fiercely. "Yes, I have the right to be happy. I fight much. I give up much. I not give up ever' thing." He halted, catching his breath, panting with unrepressed emotion. Nini stepped back involuntarily before the des-

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perate fervor of his face. He saw the movement.

"No," he cried, more gently, drawing her toward him with ardent, sinewy strength. "You cannot run away. I need you, li'l' brown girl."

Nini came to him in a dream, led as much by his smile, which stirred new, undiscovered springs of life and hope and gladness and peace within her, and by the beckoning love-light in his blue eyes, as by his arm. His hands ran up her arms with soft, caressing touch, that thrilled her with content, and rested on her shoulders. She felt her body tremble and weaken, until it seemed to her that only the firm grasp of his hands upheld her. She tried to think and she could not. It was all so strange, so sweet, so miraculous. She wanted to throw herself upon his broad breast and nestle there, until she could withstand the look of his eyes without being suddenly faint with overpowering, impending happiness.

"Li'l' brown girl," he whispered hoarsely, his face very near to hers. "You not believe that which I say las' night? P'raps it is true, but you not believe it?"

Nini shook her head, smiling breathlessly. She

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could not speak. The world seemed to sway about her, an unreal forest of reeling trees against a dream-colored sky. Not knowing what she did, she caught at his arms and clung to him like a child.

"You — you lak me, li'l brown girl?" His face came closer. She could feel his hot breath on her cheek, her lips. She tried to nod. Her eyes closed.

"Oh, M'sieu," she moaned, in a very agony of strange ecstasy.

Dan Smith's arms wound crushingly about her slender, yielding body. They tightened until she could scarcely breathe, and she was glad, wonderfully, gloriously glad. She felt his cheek upon her hair, and the heat of his body seemed to leap to hers and enfold her to her very feet in a warming glow.

"I love you, li'l brown girl," he panted, his lips close to her ear. "I love you when I see you. I love you alway, ever since." His voice faltered. Then it burst forth in a stifled cry. "I try to stop and I cannot. I love you. I love you. I love you."

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His hand curled about her neck to her chin, and dragged her head almost roughly from his breast, turning her face upward until she saw, dimly, through tear-wet lashes, the madly tender look in his blue eyes, his eager, passion-swept face. Then a whirlwind of blissful, ineffable sweetness seemed to engulf her, to tear her from all the moorings her simple life had known. He kissed her fiercely, until her lips were as white as her pallid face, until her heart seemed ready to burst with its triumphant, ecstatic beating. She tried to hide her head against his breast. But he held her away, gazing down at her. At last she opened her eyes slowly and looked up at him, and her smile was like a glorified rainbow shining through her tears. And her upward look, which granted him everything, withholding nothing, seemed to transform Dan Smith. His arms became a loving shelter about her. He kissed her cheek, her brow, her neck, her hair, softly, lingeringly. He whispered crooning fragments of phrases, as if to a child.

“Beautiful li’l brown girl — the light of the heaven that descen’ through the tree to me — I

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love you. The light it blin' my eye. It shine in my heart — only the li'l' brown girl an' I an' The Win', see, it is the worl'. The beautiful hair, it bin' me — I cannot run away. The little ear it listen, an' it hear my heart sing for you. My li'l' brown girl — my beautiful li'l' brown girl." He hesitated. Then he spoke so softly that she could scarcely hear the trembling words. "Li'l' brown girl love Dan Smith?"

Nini uttered a low, smothered cry. She slipped her arms loose, and, twining them about his neck, she pulled his face down to hers and kissed his lips.

"I love you," she cried passionately. "I will marry you. I will go away to the ends of the world with you. Oh, M'sieu, with you, with you always."

She waited eagerly for his answering embrace, but it did not come. "I will marry you." They were Franchette's words, but they brought the artist to himself. The beautiful dream of the moment tumbled about him in grotesque ruins. The happy light died on his face. He took the girl's clinging arms from his neck and held them, he knew not

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how tightly, for a silent moment. And Nini was bewildered at the pitiful sadness of his face. Then he sank down before her, and clasping her knees convulsively, he buried his head in her skirts. And so he remained for some seconds, the girl bending over him, amazed, wretched, not knowing what to do.

At last he arose and stood erect; and the anguish of his look made her sick at heart with intangible dread.

"Pardon, li'l' brown girl," he said, and the imploring appeal in his eyes made her long to go to him, to console him. "I am a fool, a mad man." He threw the words from him in anger at himself and in utter humility. "I have not the right to love you. I have not the right to touch you, to kiss you —" He stopped, the lovelight leaping into his eyes once more. "My li'l' brown girl," he almost sobbed. "My li'l' brown girl."

"Why should you not kiss me, M'sieu?" she asked quietly.

"Listen, Nini," he said bitterly, a spasm of pain scarring his handsome face. "I am not Dan Smith. I am — nobody. I am a thing. The fate

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it play with me. It play with me. Oh, you cannot know!" he moaned from his tortured soul. Then he became rigid, striving to control himself. "I have not the right to love. I cannot marry. I am born to hate, an' to die. To die," he repeated with a long breath. "It is all that I ask."

Nini came close to him and put her hand upon his arm.

"You love me, M'sieu?" she asked calmly.

The truth shone clear in his eyes as he looked down at her. His hands twitched at his sides, held by iron will.

"I love you, li'l' brown girl," he cried. "But not again mus' I say it. Not again mus' I touch you. Not again —"

"It is enough," interrupted the girl. "I do not understand, M'sieu, anything except that you are not yourself, that something troubles you, and that I love you. You love me. Nothing else matters, M'sieu, can't you see?" She faltered slightly. "You need not touch me, M'sieu," she went on more slowly. "You need not speak to me nor even look at me. I will try to bear it. But, M'sieu, I must be near you." Her courage

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seemed to flag, and her eyes filled with entreaty. "You will not leave me, M'sieu? I think I should die if you left me."

As they faced each other, it was the girl who was composed in spite of her words. Gradually her spiritual serenity wrought upon him, calming him.

"I not leave you, li'l' brown girl," he said at last, and the love in his voice made her happy again. "Sometime, p'raps, you know. I tell you. Then you hate me."

"No," she shook her head with a gentle smile.

"Now we paint," he said abruptly, turning to where the canvas, which she had brought, leaned against one of the trees above the spring. Without a word she carried it to him, while he, with resolute absorption, set his easel and stool and prepared for work. He thanked her, without looking up, and she returned to her place beside the spring.

From her mossy seat she watched him wistfully. It seemed to her that he looked older, sadder, as he worked with set face over the canvas. There were moments when he seemed another man from

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the lithe, merry stranger who had stolen up beside her there a few days before. She tried to understand, but love opened her eyes only to her changed self.

It was the same spring that bubbled up beneath the protecting trees, but that spring had been a magic mirror in which, by a glimpse of the stranger's face, she had read all the unstirred, unrevealed depths of her womanhood. All the secrets that had been hidden to the simple, unsuspecting girl had been made known to her, and she wandered on, through the wonderful castle they had built for her, finding new, beautiful delights at every step. What if for a moment the way seemed impassable? She could turn and look back at all the long halls and rooms and courts, through which her soul had come, remembering each momentary discovery with renewed joy. And what a transformation had come to her as she had wandered through this castle of love; tiptoeing, at first, frightened, uncomprehending; then shyly, wonderingly, fearful lest the walls should vanish about her; then yielding herself wholly, hurrying on through court and chamber,

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unsatisfied, searching for some unknown goal that lured her on; and now at last self-reliant, serene, lifted to supreme happiness by a vision of the mysterious, desired vistas beyond this bleak, inexplicable wall that suddenly blocked her path.

In her new strength, her firm faith, she sat herself down, believing that some mighty force, which she could not understand, would shatter the blank wall which she could not climb nor circle, and would open to her the beautiful garden beyond, with its fountains and its endless paths of shelter and happiness, the garden of the castle of love. She could wait now, with his kisses tingling on her lips, on her neck, on her cheek, on her hair; with the glance of his eyes, lit by love, still reflected in hers; with the pressure of his arms still numbing her shoulders; yes, she could wait now, for she could remember and she could hope.

She looked about her content. The staunch trees had a new meaning to her, and the moss and the sky. And it was all because of this strange man who sat opposite her, frowning over the canvas. How wonderful it all was! No, it was he who was wonderful. She watched him with tender

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eyes, her mind overcome by yearnings to rush to him and to thank him, to comfort him and to help him. Never once did her faith in him falter. She had forgotten every word of his self-condemnation. She knew only that he was the great man of all the world, and she believed, with pure trust, that he would be always hers, to serve and to obey; and in her innocence she cared not how.

A half hour passed; an hour; and still he worked on while she smiled and dreamed. Neither heard the sound of approaching steps, coming from below where the brown forest ended in a searing black line, or the subdued murmur of voices. Mr. Huntworth, followed by half a dozen sturdy, nondescript figures, appeared, unnoticed, in the little open about the spring. Huntworth, who had been arguing with the leaders of the men about him, stopped as he saw the pair, and the man beside him who was speaking broke off in the middle of a sentence. A few seconds later Nini felt their presence, and looked toward them surprised. She saw that M'sieu was frowning. That frown had been almost continuous since yesterday, and the nervous, anxious manner also.

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"Good morning, Smith," said Mr. Huntworth.

Dan Smith, startled for an instant, was swiftly on his feet, his lithe body straight and towering, as he bowed courteously. There had been a certain restraint in Mr. Huntworth's greeting, but now, as always, he warmed to the stranger, in spite of himself.

"You must have steady nerves," he said, as he came forward, "painting after yesterday." Then, remembering the men: "These are some of my men. They were working eight or ten miles away. They saw the glow of the fire, and came to help. Disappointed, weren't you, boys, that it was all over before you got here?"

The lumbermen assented in diverse ways, some by exclamations, others by nods, but they were all instantly and respectfully silent as Huntworth went on.

"And this is the man I told you about, boys, the man who pulled me out. I don't know why you did it, Smith," he continued earnestly, "but I want to thank you. It's the second time, you know."

Dan Smith was boyishly pleased at the older

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man's praise. He remembered, with answering applause, Mr. Huntworth's foolhardy courage.

"It is nothing," he said, with a deprecating smile. "M'sieu is so brave he throw away his life. We pick it up, Nini and I, that is all." He stiffened perceptibly as he glanced at Nini.

"Oh, no," protested Nini. "He saved us both, M'sieu."

Mr. Huntworth looked from one to the other curiously. Then he turned to the men.

"Go on up to the house, boys," he said. "I want to talk to Smith for a minute. I'll join you later."

"A fine lot of men, Smith," he said heartily, when they had gone on. "And loyal to me, loyal to me," he repeated, proudly. Then he came abruptly to the point.

"I haven't half told you, Smith," he said, with hearty directness, "what I think of you. I liked you at the start, and you've more than earned it."

Dan Smith raised his hand to stop him, but he was patently gratified at the older man's approval.

"You were kind enough to say that you like

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me, that we could be friends," went on Mr. Huntworth. "You've proved it already. Now I want you to prove it again."

The artist was genially ready. He seemed to have forgotten everything for the moment, except that this kindly, friendly man, to whom he was drawn by some strong, inner bond, wished his aid. And it was the best in Huntworth that spoke, that eager, dominant quality that had made the man a master, by right of personality, and a friend among the men who had turned mile upon mile of woodland into money and power for him. With him, as with many strong men, this quality came to the surface in a crisis.

"Why did you warn me of this fire?" Mr. Huntworth asked. The question suggested only the desire for direct information. There was no hidden motive.

"I think it is possible, the day before, while we paint," Dan Smith answered with defensive dignity. "I say to Nini to tell you. I not know why I say it to her," he added truthfully. "I am sorry after."

"There was no reason, Smith?" Huntworth

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inquired. "You just thought of it as a possibility?"

The artist hesitated, but Nini, who had been listening, leaned forward.

"Pierre spoke of it first, M'sieu," she said. "He made us both think of it."

"Pierre." Huntworth appeared to ignore everything Nini said except the Indian's name. "Pierre," he repeated. There was no trace of astonishment on his face, only gloomy confirmation. He changed the subject completely when he continued.

"I never understood, Smith, where you came from yesterday and how you found Nini. I was confused, you know."

"I rise with the sun," Dan Smith replied readily now, "an' The Win' an' I go there." He pointed to the north, beyond the visible black line. "I see smoke an' fire. It is ver' li'l'. I jump to the groun', an' I say to The Win' to go home, an' I stay to kill the fire, you see. The Win' is afraid an' run away, back to the li'l' cabin, but the fire it grow an' it mak me to retreat, slow."

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He stopped at Mr. Huntworth's quick sign of understanding.

"I thought we had stopped it." The older man went on directly to a new inquiry. "Then the trees on this side got afire. You got me to the brook somehow. I was dazed, of course, but I thought somebody passed us and shouted as he ran. Did you hear it?"

The rapid fire of questions was like a cross-examination. Dan Smith moved uneasily, but he nodded.

"*Oui*," he said quietly. "I hear it."

Mr. Huntworth followed up the advantage without delay. The momentous earnestness of his voice laid hold of the artist's willing sympathies.

"I want to be fair, Smith," he said, "and I had a feeling you might know something about it. I believe that fire was set purposely. I believe it was set again after we'd stopped it. And I believe," he went on with certain emphasis, "that the man who passed us by the brook did it. Who was he? Do you know, Smith? It — it —" For a second there was suffering, real and poign-

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ant, in his face. "It may be a pretty serious matter to me, Smith."

With the word "fair" the stranger jumped spontaneously to a decision. The word, with his instinctive, irresistible liking for the man, joined in an overpowering impulse.

"Fair," he repeated, half to himself. "One mus' be fair." His eyes lost their vacant look. "I think it is the Indian — Pierre," he said deliberately; and then, as if the open confession loosened his tongue, "He wish you ill, M'sieu," he ran on rapidly. "I know it. He hate you. Watch him close, M'sieu. F' is ver' cunning. He is ver' sage. He say he is your frien', an' all the time he hate you. He —"

Mr. Huntworth had listened, holding his breath with surprise that changed to joy and profound gratitude. He reached forward, and put his left hand upon Dan Smith's shoulder. There was a suspicion of moisture in his eyes as he spoke.

"God bless you, my boy," he said extending his right hand eagerly. Dan Smith grasped the hand with a hard, wringing grip. In their overflow of feeling the two men had forgotten Nini. Of

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a sudden in the stillness there came from the edge of the upland woods a low, weird call. It was like and yet unlike a shrill bird-summon. There was a human note in it. Both men seemed to recognize it. Their hands fell apart as if by mutual impulse. Mr. Huntworth swung toward the direction of the sound and waited, tensely alert. But it was not repeated. Without a word, he hurried, half running, toward the spot, and plunged into the thick tangle.

The echoing call had emptied Dan Smith's face of sentiment. Now his look became lowering, twisted with pain. He ran a hand through his hair agitatedly. Then he lifted clenched fists upward, staring between them with half shut, agonized eyes.

"I shake *his* hand," he muttered, his voice hoarse and guttural.

Nini came to him, her momentary flush of pride in him changed to bewilderment. She touched his shoulder timidly, but he shook her from him. His body strained as if it would pull itself apart.

"I shake his hand," he groaned, in a paroxysm of anguish.

CHAPTER VII

"A FOOL OF THE FATES"

PIERRE had been sent away. Franchette was so excited, as she told Nini, that the words fairly tumbled, stumbling over each other, from her lips. Yes, M'sieu had sent him away. The Indian had looked very ugly for a moment, but he had noticed behind M'sieu the group of big men from the lumber camp, and he had said nothing. Franchette had heard it all, for M'sieu had called her to prepare dinner for Pierre before he went. She to prepare dinner for the Indian! Franchette shook her head testily at the idea. Pierre had eaten of her cooking for months, but never before had she been told to prepare a meal especially for him. And when he had eaten, M'sieu had given him a bundle of clothes and money, much money, Franchette was certain. And Pierre had only scowled. He had not thanked M'sieu. He had gone off down the road without a word or a

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backward look. It was hard, admitted the pensive Franchette, to be sent away like that, for nothing in the world except that M'sieu was tired of him. It was not like M'sieu. He was usually so kind. Franchette became almost sorry for Pierre. How could she tell, she asked Nini, with vigorous gestures, returning characteristically to herself, when M'sieu would take it into his head to send her away on a moment's notice. Then followed a torrent of pessimism and self-pity and self-depreciation, emphasized by the clatter of pans and dishes with which her active hands busied themselves, until the mood ran itself out. She drew from the oven proudly a snowy pudding which was to be part of M'sieu's dinner, and promptly forgot about Pierre. And we must not blame Franchette, for it often takes something less than a snowy pudding to make us forget those who are nearer to us than Pierre was to Franchette.

Nini had only half listened. For her, at the moment, there was nothing but the memory of Dan Smith's hard, haggard face, as he had ridden away without a word or even a wave of the hand in farewell. She knew only that she was glad

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Pierre was gone. She turned with relief to the task of serving the dinner, although she dreaded even to see young M'sieu Thomas now, and to be reminded —

Late that afternoon Dan Smith, alone in his little cabin, huddled in a chair, his elbows upon the table, his chin sunk deep in his hands, heard a twig snap just outside the door. He sat bolt upright and listened. Then, leaping to his feet, overturning the chair with a crash in his haste, he ran to the doorway. There was no one in sight. Unsatisfied, he hurried to the corner, and gazed up and down, and across to the woods. Then, so certain was he that he had heard a step, he walked rapidly around the cabin, searching the thick grass and the edge of the forest. But he saw no movement except that of waving stalks and quivering branches, and he heard no sound save the rustling of the light breeze. He returned within, tarrying, unconvinced, and, replacing the chair, sat down again beside the table. For some time he was vigilant, perturbed. But gradually his mind was concentrated once more

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upon the head of the Indian girl on the worn birch bark.

The picture was resting against a roll of canvas upon the table. How long it had been since he placed it there, since he first sat down before it, he himself could not have told. But the sun, whose lower rim was now hidden behind the western forest, had been high, and warming light had melted the face which was now indistinct in the dusk. To Dan Smith the picture became more real, more flesh and blood with the approaching twilight. He bowed before the girlish features, as before some dimly lighted, mystical shrine, instinct with supernatural life.

"Pardon, Gleam o' Dawn," he mumbled humbly. "I do nothing. It is true. I wait. I think p'raps to-morrow point the way. An' alway it is to-morrow. I am lak a ball that go back an' forth, back an' forth, an' stop never. I am tire'," he added, with a sad, whimsical smile. "I am ver' tire'."

The smile faded quickly, however. His face was seamed with the old, unavailing struggle.

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"But it is not my fault," he argued, more clearly. "I am half Indian, half white man, half you, Gleam o' Dawn, half him. An' the two fight in my vein, till my body is tire' an' my heart is sick. I try to go forward an' I cannot. I try to go back an' I cannot. I try to run away an' I cannot. Where is the en'?"

It seemed to him that the deep, dark eyes of the picture bored into his very soul, and fathomed the weakness of his defense.

"Have you no pity, Gleam o' Dawn?" he whispered. "Yes, it is true. I love him. I love you both. I love him lak a son love his father. I try to hate him, an' it is not possible. You go with me ever'where. I think of you much an' I love you. I think of him li'l' an' hate him. I hate him enough, is it not so? Now I can love him?" He waited pitifully, as if he expected an answer. "An' the li'l' brown girl, I love her also. It is differen'. It is all I ask in the worl', to love her." Passion pulsed in his voice. "Why you stan' between us? Why mus' I aaway be nobody, mongrel, outcas'? My heart is made for love. Why mus' I hate? Have you no pity?" He whis-

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pered again, despairing. "Have you no pity?"

The steady, inexorable gaze of the picture became, to his fancy, a judgment upon his vacillation. It constrained him to an artificial poise, a reluctant acceptance of his fateful destiny.

"It is well. I am weak, woman-man, coward, but I am son of Gleam o' Dawn. He leave you. You die. For myself, I forgive him. For you, I hate him. He mus' suffer. I forget that which my heart say. I do the duty. Now." He jumped to his feet, as if he feared his decision would leave him. He walked, with quick nervous steps, to the door. Almost immediately, however, he came back to the table, the old conflict in his face.

"How can I know? How can I know, Gleam o' Dawn? P'raps it is a lie. P'raps it is not he. I mus' be sure." His eye, glancing away from the picture, caught the tarnished edge of the packet of cards lying upon the table. They seemed to flash a new idea to his half-crazed brain. He swooped down upon them exultingly. "The card, they tell," he cried, with wild laughter. "I try the fortune with him. Then we know."

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The card, they tell. I go now before I think," he muttered, rushing to the door. "Quick."

They had finished supper at the big house, and were sitting outside in the gloaming, smoking and talking. It was spasmodic conversation. The hush of the evening the dusk of enclosing woods, made Young Thomas as uncommunicative as his father, and Mr. Huntworth's occasional remarks were terse and of changing subject, the checked overflow of an active mind spurred by events. In the clearing the pipes of the lumbermen, who were lounging after their work in the burned forest, were like stray glow-worms in the gathering darkness. Only the low murmur of voices and, now and then, a snatch of song, told of their presence. It was so quiet that the three men upon the porch could hear the noise of Franchette's dishes in the kitchen, and the busy, human sounds only accentuated the peace and content with which the night surrounded them.

Suddenly Mr. Huntworth leaped to his feet with a startled exclamation. From far away, down by the lake it seemed, there came a low, clear call,

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weird, echoing insistently on the silence. As it was repeated again and again, it came nearer. Mr. Thomas arose and joined Huntworth, who stood clutching the rail, peering through the darkness.

"What's the matter, Huntworth?" he asked.

"Did you hear it?" Mr. Huntworth demanded under his breath. But Mr. Thomas's colder blood was unstirred. He looked at his friend with matter-of-fact surprise.

"Hear what?" he said and listened. "Oh, yes, I hear it now."

The muffled thud of hoofs on the road below was audible now, but the weird call was not repeated. Mr. Huntworth heard them.

"Get a gun," he said coolly, over his shoulder.

"You can't tell what deviltry —"

He broke off and listened. The hoof-beats were coming nearer, pounding frantically upon the gravel, as if the rider were in furious haste. At Mr. Huntworth's words Young Thomas had rushed, excitedly, into the house. His father still stood beside Huntworth, mildly puzzled, his metallic nature otherwise unmoved.

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"What's the matter, Huntworth?" he asked again.

Mr. Huntworth shook his head, irritated by the interruption of the other's voice. The horse came galloping up the slope, nearer, nearer. It scrambled over the knoll and stopped short. From the porch they could hear its snorting. The men in the clearing were moving toward it, inquisitively, interested.

"Hola," called a clear, musical voice. "M'sieu — M'sieu Huntworth, is he here?"

Mr. Huntworth ejaculated his relief.

"It's Dan Smith. Right here, Smith," he called, with loud heartiness.

Young Thomas came running across the porch. He pushed the handle of a revolver into Mr. Huntworth's hand.

"We don't need that now," said Huntworth, looking down at the smooth steel that glittered under the light of his cigar. "Well, never mind," he added. And he shoved the revolver into his hip pocket, just as the outline of Dan Smith appeared through the gloom.

"*Eh bien*, but I am glad to be here," cried the

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artist, ignoring a proffered chair and squatting easily upon the top step. "The night it is strange. I think there is some one before me in the trail. I ride har' to catch him, an' see, there is no one. Then I think I hear some one in the tree, an' I look an' again there is no one. Then I think some one come from behin', an' I stop The Win', an' wait. I wait long time, but the soun' it stop, an' again there is no one. Then I tell The Win' to go quick. I not lak the silence. I not know why. An' The Win' he is frighten' also. He run ver' fast. Bah, I am a fool."

He leaned back against the post, gazing up at Mr. Huntworth, whose face appeared now and then in the glow of his cigar. Huntworth had taken a chair at his side, and was tipping back comfortably.

"Strained nerves, Smith." Huntworth had completely regained his equanimity. "I thought I heard something a few moments ago. We haven't recovered from the fire yet, I guess."

"The fire, that is it," replied Dan Smith, with feverish gayety. "There is nothing, you see? It is all of my min'. P'raps the min' remember

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something that come an'— what you say — haun me. I think sometime if one have not the min', or can be ver' happy. But then if I have not th min', I cannot think, an' *voila*, I not know how happy I am. What does it matter?" He laughed recklessly.

Mr. Huntworth ignored what sounded to him like fantastic prattle, and changed the subject casually.

"I sent Pierre away to-day," he said.

"Pierre he go." He threw back his head with an unnnatural chuckle. "It is the way of the worl', is it not so? They come an' they go. All is change. How one come? How one go? Why one come? Why one go? Where one come from? Where one go? P'raps there is a reason. I can not know. It is a foolish worl'."

There was something in the quality of the stranger's voice, as well as in the wild words, something in his brittle laughter, echoing in the still darkness, that held the three men silent. But Dan Smith seemed to be unable to bear the stillness.

"To win or to lose, what is it?" he ran on scoffingly. "Bah, it is lak a picture that one

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paint. One work much. The picture it grow. One think it is ver' beautiful, gran'. One is ver' proud. Then one who know come an' look. He put his finger on a place one paint early, in the beginning. It is bad. It mak it all bad, a daub. One cannot change it. One hide it. The worl' say it is fine, p'raps, but it is ugly, bad. Bah! It is the life." He leaned forward and looked up at Mr. Huntworth. "Is it not so, M'sieu?" he said.

Mr. Huntworth's chair creaked with his uneasy movement.

"It is often so," he assented.

"Everybody makes mistakes." Mr. Thomas's insignificant voice was heavy with wisdom. "Nobody is perfect."

"Ever'body mak mistak," the artist gibed. "All the worl' say it, to mak the heart keep quiet. I am not so bad as my frien', eh? It is that which one say. One buy a beeg frame, an' hide the bad part of the picture, so that no one can see. Then one point to it, an' is all swell up with pride. An' all the time one know it is a lie. You are a good man, M'sieu," the voice grew

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insinuating as he turned towards Mr. Huntworth. "All the worl' say you are a good man. Have you the wish that the picture that you paint — of your life, you see? — is unroll', and hang in a gallery, where all can come an' see ever'thing that you paint?"

Mr. Huntworth did not answer immediately. The others, surprised by the directness of the artist's inquiry, waited, and even matter-of-fact Mr. Thomas was roused by the stranger's unaccountable caprice.

"That's a hard question, Smith," said Mr. Huntworth at last, trying to make his sober tone genial.

"I change it," Dan Smith retorted, bending forward again as if he were trying to see into the older man's hidden face. "One who paint the picture well, who hide nothing, he fear nothing. He fear not the beginning. He fear not the en'. If you die to-night," — his voice was so low that it was almost a whisper — "have you sorrow, M'sieu? Have you fear?"

Perhaps it was the ominous words. Perhaps it was the artist's low, vibrant voice. Perhaps it

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was his fanatic intensity, his personal insistence. Perhaps it was the surrounding darkness, which screened each from the other and which concealed his face from all. Perhaps it was any one or all of these things that brought potential dread to the hearts of the three who listened. And perhaps it was something else, something intangible, within themselves, that quickened their pulses and checked their breathing. The moment of blank silence seemed alive, pregnant of omen, quivering.

"He that hath pity upon the poor, lendeth to the rich," said an interrupting, nasal voice from the dark at the bottom of the steps.

Mr. Huntworth's chair came to the floor with a crash. Dan Smith sprang up, nerve-racked, blundering, half-tripping. Chairs grated. There was a clatter of running feet, and Young Thomas pushed open the door. The light from within shot across the porch, and revealed, below them, the odd outline of a man, humpbacked under a huge bundle.

"What do you want, friend?" Huntworth demanded peremptorily.

The queer visitor pointed a solemn finger at

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the bundle on his back. Then, with his free hand, he began a grotesque dumb-show, laying out imaginary things upon the steps, examining them with imitated delight, wagging his head, mumbling a jargon of sounds through the thick, shaggy beard which covered his face.

"Something to sell?" Mr. Huntworth broke in, glad of the diversion.

The mimicry stopped. The man bowed ceremoniously.

"Well, come inside where we can see." Mr. Huntworth led the way within. The others followed, Dan Smith last of all, loitering, restless, chagrined.

Once inside the trader put down his pack. His little, ferret-like eyes, growing accustomed to the light, fled anxiously from one face to another of the men about him, and back to Mr. Huntworth. For a moment his short, rotund body was erect, with the easy air of a gentleman, and he smiled dryly as if he had seen the discomfiture he had occasioned, and was enjoying it. Then he stooped over his pack, loosening its strings.

"Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the

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poor, he also shall cry and shall not be heard," he whined. He peeked up at them cringingly through half-closed eyes, his body almost deformed in his meek humility.

Mr. Thomas regarded him with patronizing patience, a contrast to his son who was openly enlivened by the novelty of it all. They had both forgotten Dan Smith, but Mr. Huntworth had not. He was watching the artist now. His concern lessened as he saw the quizzical, penetrating scrutiny with which Dan Smith was studying the peddler. Gradually he threw off, as idle chatter, the lingering, forbidding questions. The boy in Dan Smith was at the surface now, and it was the impulsive boy in him that Huntworth liked. He seemed a long forgotten memory of the older man's happy youth. Huntworth turned again to the peddler and took in, at a glance, the shabby clothing, the worn shoes, the soiled shirt from whose collar hung a threadbare tie that had once been red. He was sorry for him.

"You must have come a long way, friend," he said. "You must be tired."

The trader darted a keen upward glance at him,

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which seemed half amused, wholly pleased. Then he bowed his head between lifted, deprecating shoulders.

"If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small," he quoted, plaintively.

He tore open the mouth of his canvas bag, and began to pull out his wares, placing them dexterously upon table or chair, patting them proudly, arranging them with sleek fingers, whose neatness was in marked contrast to his unkempt beard and ragged clothing. In the midst of it he felt Dan Smith's fixed stare, and faced about slyly. He smirked placatingly at the tall man. Then he looked away, disconcerted. He went on laying out the contents of his pack, but jerkily, mechanically, as if he were thinking of other things. More than once he turned with a wary movement, always to find Dan Smith's puzzled eyes watching him. With each glance the peddler became more abject, more mendicant, more servile. His mouth became a fawning grimace. His fingers ruffled his heavy mop of hair, and combed his thick beard nervously. And, intentionally, he kept his back to Dan Smith.

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His pack was slowly emptied, its contents grouped in motley array about the room: ribbons and laces and shawls, spangled with brilliant colors; perfume and cheap jewelry and knickknacks of many kinds from Chinese dolls to jumping jacks; neckties and stockings, and much more, scattered upon table and couch and chair and mantel. The bag seemed bottomless, and the men, looking about at the strange assortment littered in every corner of the room, marveled, in spite of themselves, how so much could have come from the peddler's misapen pack. The room became a gaudy show-case, under his active hands, and Huntworth, indulgent at first, grew interested, more in the peddler and his quoted Proverbs than in his wares. He beckoned to Young Thomas.

"Bring Franchette and Nini," he said quietly.

The trader started at the words. He eyed, almost apprehensively, the door through which Young Thomas disappeared. In a moment the boy returned, Franchette close on his heels. Nini followed more slowly. As she stopped in the doorway, looking about her in open amazement, the trader began to paw over his empty bag, his face

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averted. But he listened, acutely, as Mr. Huntworth spoke to the girl.

"If you see anything you like, Nini, you can have it. And you, too, Franchette."

"Thank you, M'sieu," Nini bowed shyly. She caught sight of Dan Smith and flushed slightly. "Good evening, M'sieu," she added, as he turned towards her.

"*Bon soir*, Nini."

The little peddler, bending over his pack, stole a surreptitious look from behind his shoulder, at the girl and at Dan Smith. Then he faced the group cautiously, more menial than ever, hump-backed without the pack, ingratiatingly rubbing his hands together, his shifting eyes looking downward.

Franchette had taken M'sieu at his word. She was inspecting a bright-colored shawl that was draped over the back of a chair.

"How much is it?" she demanded aggressively.

The little man mutely held up two fingers.

"Two dollars?" Franchette fingered the material gingerly, her bargaining instinct aroused.

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"I can buy it for less money at Keelend," she declared, with a belligerent jerk of her head.

The little peddler lifted one hand.

"False witnesses did rise up. They laid to my charge things that I knew not," he quavered.

Nini turned at the sound of his voice, but Franchette glowered at him, annoyed. She put her doubled fists upon her hips and tossed her head angrily. The peddler's obsequious manner, his mild, quaint words, which she scarcely understood, and the smiles of the men aroused the bully in her.

"I say it is a high price, a cheat," she affirmed.
"I can buy —"

The peddler interrupted her, the twang of his voice quaint with covert sarcasm.

"It is better to dwell in a desert land than with a contentious, fretful woman."

"You'd better take it at the price, Franchette," Huntworth put in, trying not to smile.

Franchette looked from M'sieu to the little peddler, who stood as before, his eyes downcast. Then she picked up the shawl.

"I talk too much," she grumbled. "I talk too much."

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"A soft answer turneth away wrath," quoted the peddler mollifyingly.

He had won Mr. Huntworth, however. Seeing that Nini hung back, reluctant, Huntworth himself began buying right and left, gathering pleasure with each purchase. He made the girl sit down, and he piled the things in her lap as rapidly as he selected them. And the peddler, plainly elated, watched Nini most of all.

"I guess that's enough," said Mr. Huntworth at last. He took out his wallet and began to count out the bills. There was a joy that was not greed in the little peddler's furtive eyes as they saw the thick pocketbook.

"They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house," he droned.

With each new Proverb which came from the odd little man's lips, Mr. Huntworth seemed more content with himself. He smiled again, as he folded the wallet.

"I like to do this sort of thing," he remarked heartily to Mr. Thomas. "And he's worth it."

The peddler had begun to pack, laboriously,

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the goods that remained. He glanced up, displeased.

"Riches profit not in the day of wrath," he quoted solemnly.

Huntworth was taken aback. The enthusiasm and the joy of the moment left him. His face took on its old somberness. He opened his wallet again, and added another bill to those in his hand.

"You need it more than I do," he said, handing the money to the peddler. The little man thrust the bills into his pocket without looking at them. Pride made him erect. His ferret eyes gazed at Huntworth, unwavering.

"Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich," he drawled impressively.

His sly glance fled from Huntworth to the others, and he appeared to be demurely enjoying their astonishment. Then he doubled hastily over his work, to escape Dan Smith's intent gaze which was more vigilant, more discerning with the peddler's last Proverb. As he toiled back and forth,

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his arms loaded, the dwarfish figure grew more dawdling, more jaded. Mr. Huntworth, puzzling anew over the bizarre enigma of the little man, noted the emphasized sluggishness of movement. He left the room for a moment, and returned with a bottle and a glass.

"You're tired, friend," he said, pouring out some liquor. "Drink this. It will bolster you up."

The peddler took the glass, and held it up, letting the light sparkle through its yellow contents. He pursed his lips roguishly.

"Let him drink and forget his poverty and remember his misery no more." He gulped it down, and smacked his thanks noisily.

"You'd better stay here to-night," proposed Mr. Huntworth. "He can have Pierre's bed, Franchette," he added, conclusively, to the woman.

The peddler's dry, mischievous smile suggested that he had expected the invitation. He shouldered his pack, with a submissive bow to Mr. Huntworth, and started toward the door leading to the rear, which the brisk woman now held open for him. But Dan Smith stood in his way.

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"See, M'sieu," cried the artist. "I sit in the li'l' cabin to-night, an' I say: 'M'sieu, he is ver' sad for the tree that are gone. The face of M'sieu is all of a frown. The care it weigh heavy.' An' I say: 'I go an' mak him to forget. P'raps I mak him to laugh, p'raps not. But I mak him to think of other thing.'"

The words ran from his tongue as fluently as if they had been prepared, but there was hardly suppressed excitement in his nervous gestures. "See, M'sieu," he repeated, with insinuating laughter, pulling the packet of cards from his pocket, "the card. I bring them to — what you say — entertain M'sieu. One day in the li'l' cabin — the day when the thunder come an' the rain — I tell the fortune of the young M'sieu, is it not so?"

His look asked Young Thomas for support. He was not disappointed. The suggestion instantly appealed to the boy's craving for diversion. He saw, with youthful selfishness, only the interesting possibilities for a spectator.

"Yes," he said, with a wry grin at the memory. "Tell theirs."

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"I commence, if M'sieu wish," Dan Smith rushed on, hardly waiting for Young Thomas to finish, "with the strange man who come with much to sell."

He turned to Mr. Huntworth with a coaxing smile. Few could have denied that smile, least of all Huntworth. The little peddler, however, shifted uncomfortably and edged toward the door.

"Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof," he squeaked.

"Oh, come, friend," called Mr. Huntworth, seeing his unwillingness. "It's little to ask."

The peddler surrendered with a subservient bow.

"And the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit," he finished. As he yielded his consent, however, his ferret-like glance roved about the room as if seeking a chance to escape, and then fastened upon Dan Smith's face, with the hunted look of a trapped animal. The others, readily enough, joined in the artist's rapid preparations. Mr. Thomas helped his son move a table to the center of the room, at Dan Smith's direction.

"A candle, if you please," demanded the artist,

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and Franchette, muttering under her breath, hurried out to fetch one from the kitchen.

The artist's impatient energy, his rapid side-talk that rattled on almost unceasingly diverted Mr. Huntworth. To him it was the boy again, the boy at play. He fell in, heartily, with the spirit of it. Only Nini sensed the agitated stress which Dan Smith covered from the others by action and heedless words. Only Nini felt, with indefinable certainty, that there was some purpose behind his game. Only Nini saw the steely glitter in his eyes, the glitter which she had seen before and dreaded. And, instinctively, she wished him away, back in the little cabin, away from M'sieu and the others.

Dan Smith took the candle from Franchette, and, lighting it, he placed it in the center of the table, beside the pack of cards.

"We know so li'l', each of the other, is it not so?" he prattled on. "Alway there is mystery. We know li'l' of the presen', less of the pas', and nothing of the future. We look at the card, and *voilà*, we see behin' the curtain, eh? We compre-

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hen' much." His glance ranged to Mr. Huntworth. "*Eh bien*," he cried, more gaily. "The pas' it is a question; the presen' it is a pause, time to wait an' listen; the future it is the answer. You see? It is that which Madame Marti says when she tell the fortune."

"What's the candle for, Smith?" Huntworth inquired. He did not altogether like it, but, of course, it was boy's play, the foolery of an amateur with which to pass the idle hour. He had seen it done before. It was nothing. And then it was Smith, merry, boyish, daring, happy-go-lucky, friendly Smith. Huntworth put from him tolerantly any fugitive disquietude.

"Oh, it also is of Madame Marti," explained Dan Smith, stopping to blow out a near-by lamp. "Here, M'sieu." He held courteously the chair at one end of the table for Mr. Huntworth. They sat down as he placed them, Mr. Thomas, half interested, half bored, at Huntworth's left; the little peddler crouching next; then Young Thomas reveling in his own immunity. On the other side of the table sat the two women. Mr. Huntworth had insisted on their staying to participate in the

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artist's play. Franchette was fidgeting, self-conscious, but Nini was outwardly placid, as she watched Dan Smith. At the opposite end of the short table — it was so short indeed, that Young Thomas sat at the very corner — was an empty chair, before which, on the table's edge, rested the cards. Dan Smith crossed swiftly to the remaining lamp. A second later they sat in obscure darkness, which was made more uncanny by the thin spurt of light from the single candle. They heard Dan Smith's tiptoeing footsteps as he returned, and the slight scuffle of the chair as he sat down.

"It is so with the life, eh, my friend?" In the fitful shadows his chuckle was mocking. "It is bright, an' then, quick, the dark — an' p'raps not even a candle." He looked up and down the group of faces, that were white in the pale light. As he shuffled the cards, Huntworth lit a fresh cigar at the candle.

"Not too much mummery, Smith," he said. "Go ahead with it."

Perhaps it was to reassure himself, perhaps to give confidence to Franchette, who had crossed her-

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self twice superstitiously. It irritated Dan Smith.

"I ask only one thing," he said bluntly. "It is the silence. Cut, if you please." He handed the cards to the peddler.

The little man fumbled with the cards, glancing apprehensively at Dan Smith, meanwhile, from the corner of his eye. Three times he cut, and the three unturned cards lay before the artist.

"I see a man." The voice was a low monotone. "Now his face is black with hair. Now it is clean lak a baby." The peddler's trim hand, which lay upon the table, slid out of sight. "I see him with a li'P boy, an' the clothes of the boy are bright color. I see him give something to the boy. It is a book." Dan Smith looked up quickly, straight at the little peddler's face. It was only for a second. "He talk much to the boy. He say much that is good." He was bending over the cards again, his lips pressed tightly together to hide his success. "The boy go away, a long journey. He carry the book." He paused. "I see again the same man. He carry a bag, but the bag it is a lie. His head is full of other thing." Mr. Huntworth was scanning

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the trader quizzically, and the little man's face, withdrawn into the half-darkness, was a study of conflicting doubt, mistrust and amazement. "I see him again," the monotone continued more rapidly. "He is alone. He stan' in san' that reach to his ankle. He is faint an' his mouth is dry lak a bone. But he remember much, an' he is ver' happy. He lie down all alone, an' forget. An' the san' blow an' cover him."

The artist swept the cards together and began to shuffle them once more. The others moved in their chairs, with noisy relief, and, above the rustling and the uncurbed breathing, could be heard Franchette muttering softly to herself. The peddler alone did not stir. He seemed fascinated by the tall figure at the table's end. Acute understanding replaced the doubt on his face. His glance glided away, inquiring, to Mr. Huntworth, who was stretched back in his chair, smoking musingly, while Mr. Thomas cut the cards at Dan Smith's motioned request.

"I see,"—the monotonous voice began again, and Huntworth put aside his cigar to listen—"many long year. The man I see now he look

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always for something. See, it shine an' glitter in his han'. It is gol'. He fin' it here an' there, an' he pile it in one beeg pile. He watch it grow, an' he sleep beside it. He see nothing but the gol'. He have no frien' excep' the frien' that bring him the gol'." The voice paused as before. "An' then I see a great win', with the soun' lak a knife that strike, an' see, the gol' is gone. It is sweep to the four en' of the worl', an' other men pick it up an' smile. But he smile not. He hunt for it ever'where, but he fin' it not. He see the men that smile, as he smile long ago when he fin' the gol'. An' he is angry, an' he is ver' tire'. An' " — the tall form leaned closer over the cards — "An' then," he added softly, "I not see him."

Mr. Thomas folded his arms.

"Humph," he sniffed, looking at Huntworth. But Huntworth was busy with the ash of his cigar. Mr. Thomas turned testily toward Dan Smith, who was again shuffling the cards.

"Humph," he sniffed again.

A card slipped from the pack and fluttered to the table, and Nini saw that the artist's hand was trembling as he picked it up. Then, with a supple,

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defiant sweep, Dan Smith laid the pack before Huntworth.

Mr. Huntworth looked up with a start and shook his head. With a motion of his hand he indicated Franchette, who was mumbling indistinguishable words under her breath. But Dan Smith did not move. He remained bent, unyielding, waiting, in the oppressive stillness. At last Huntworth gave in, perforce. He took the cigar from his mouth, and cut the cards. Dan Smith seized them and spread the upturned three before him. His hands clutched at the edge of the table to prop his swaying, suspended body.

"I see —" He halted, swallowing nervously, and Nini, sitting beside him could see that his body was shaking with some unaccountable emotion. "I see a li'l' river" — the voice gathered strength, monotonous no longer — "many tree an' tent lak cone. It is the twilight; fire burn; many people. They are — yes — they are Indian." His glance blazed up at Mr. Huntworth, who was leaning forward, his face a ghastly yellow, his lips distended, his eyes wide with open fear.

"I see young man, white, ver' pale, come through

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the tree. He is ver' tire', ver' faint." The voice rose with the tumult of the words until it was almost a cry. Huntworth lifted one hand as if to stop him, but Dan Smith pushed on, unheeding. "The people meet him. They are kin' to him, and mak him to be in the beeg tent." He forgot the cards. His hands were lifted, clasp^{ing} and unclasp^{ing}, and in his eyes, glar^{ing} at Mr. Huntworth, and about his mouth was fierce, savage triumph. "Again I see the white man. He is in a circle. He fight with an Indian, with the knife. The people watch. See, the red man fall. The white man win."

Slowly Daniel Huntworth lurched to his feet. He tried to speak, but only inarticulate sounds came from his dry lips.

"Again I see him," went on the relentless voice. "He is with an Indian girl. She is —

"Stop." It was more a gasp than a word. For a tense second the two faces, only a few inches apart, stared at each other across the candle flame. Mr. Huntworth's shoulders sagged, and his heavy body slumped upon the table, one arm upsetting

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the candle stick. The candle sputtered and went out, leaving the room in complete darkness.

There was an instant of blank, unforgettable, nerveless silence. Then came the sounds of scraping chairs, of hurrying feet, of exclamations, and of broken, unfinished sentences of command and entreaty, but above them all rang out high-pitched, hysterical laughter that echoed fiendishly in the blackness, making those who heard it shudder.

"I only tell the fortune." The raucous words ended in a scream of mad laughter. "I only make to — what you say — entertain M'sieu."

The raving and the laughter ceased. A hand was on Dan Smith's arm. He tried to throw it off, but it clung to him with tenacious pressure. He swung about to grapple with the intruder, but his fingers, groping forward, touched silken hair that led his hand to a smooth curving neck and throat. Dan Smith drew back but not quickly enough, for his free arm was caught and held firmly by another hand.

"M'sieu," came a low, beseeching whisper.

Two or three matches scratched simultaneously

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and flickered. Then the room became dazzling in the bright light which shone on frightened, questioning faces, and on M'sieu, collapsed upon the table, his face buried against his arm. Dan Smith felt himself released as the darkness was broken. He turned now and looked into the face of the girl who stood at his side, while the others grouped about Mr. Huntworth, all except Franchette, who was on her knees in one corner, mumbling, praying, crossing herself frantically. Almost immediately Huntworth drew himself up and fell back wearily. His harrowed eyes supplicated Dan Smith.

"See, M'sieu, the card, they are not touch'." The artist formed the words with difficulty. His body quivered, as if torn by conflicting impulses. His voice was soft, even in its tormenting. "I go on, is it not so, M'sieu? There is much more. The story, it is only at the beginning."

Mr. Huntworth felt out for his cigar. He shook his head and tried to smile.

"Not now, Smith," he said hoarsely. "Not now."

Dan Smith did not see the hostile faces that were turned toward him. He saw only the worn old

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man, broken, it seemed, in a moment. Sympathy, almost tenderness, sprang into his face. The whole man seemed to change in an instant.

"I am ver' sorry, M'sieu." It was the old, genial voice, gentle with regret and commiseration. His glance wandered about the room vacantly, and returned to Mr. Huntworth. "I am a fool, M'sieu, a fool of the fate." He hesitated. "I go home now." He turned on his heel and walked slowly to the door which led into the hall. The others watched him, unmoving, all except Nini, who followed him as if in a dream. In the doorway he turned.

"Good night, M'sieu. I — I not tell the future. I not tell the future."

He laughed again hysterically, and disappeared into the hallway. Nini hurried after him. She came up with him at the outer door.

"What is it, M'sieu?" she begged. She did not know what to say. She felt only that she must understand, that she must be with him, that she must help him.

Dan Smith whirled about and caught her by the shoulders. "You see how strange he look?" he

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demanded, with such fierce eagerness that the girl recoiled.

"You see?" he insisted wildly.

"Yes, M'sieu," Nini faltered.

"P'raps — p'raps it is true," he whispered.

He let her go and, throwing open the door, he vanished into the darkness. She saw him cross the moonlit clearing. She shivered as she heard again from the knoll the echoing, mad laughter. Then she heard the beat of the big bay's hoofs going away, going away, going away. Nini sank upon her knees, sobbing unrestrainedly. Suddenly she became conscious that some one stood in the inner doorway. She sprang to her feet, stifling her sobs, hiding her tears. It was only the little peddler. She closed the outer door slowly, fumbling with the latch to gain time and control. When she turned, he had gone, and, still lingering, she followed him back into the room.

CHAPTER VIII

"A WIFE'S A WIFE"

AT first Dan Smith rode like a madman, spurring the big bay and yanking spasmodically at the rein, talking incoherently, bursting into peals of hysterical laughter. Gradually he quieted. Above him the full moon sailed in a clear sky. The stars winked down at him through the trees. But the rider did not look up. He did not seem to see even the winding aisles of mystical light that led away from him between the trees. He did not feel the crisp chill of the autumn air. He sat The Wind, a rigid, inert figure. He turned his head only once, and then, irritably, as if the brighter, more concentrated light, where the trail widened into a little open circle, disturbed his thoughts. In the narrow trail again, he gazed moodily straight ahead, until he came to the edge of the trees, and saw the little cabin, a vague mass of shadow, bulk dark and lonesome in the mellow radiance. There

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he pulled up the big bay sharply, for he heard vagrant maunderings of timid melody. As he listened he knew that it was a violin, and that it came from somewhere about the huge shadow that was his home. He smiled with memory, and rode on slowly. The Wind understood his wish, and picked his way softly in the thick grass.

Of a sudden the indeterminate music ceased, and there was only the lapping of the water on the beach, to break the stillness. Then a faint, tremulous wail came from the door of the cabin.

"François, *bon homme*. We not hurt nobody, ma violin and I."

Dan Smith turned the corner of the cabin.

"Have not fear, François," he called soothingly. "You are good man, as you say."

The goblin-like shape, crouched in the doorway, straightened up at the sound of the artist's voice, and came pattering hurriedly to the side of the big bay. He peered up at Dan Smith's face. Then he laughed shrilly.

"It is the strange M'sieu, ma violin," he chattered, bending caressingly over the fiddle. "Nothing to fear, ma violin."

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The artist threw himself from his horse, and the fiddler jumped backward, his face drawn with returning terror.

"Strange noise," he muttered. "We hear dem, ma violin and I. We not like dem, de strange noise. We rest *ici* and we make de moosic, good moosic," he declared, brightening. "Good moosic, eh, ma violin?" he crooned.

The artist tied the big bay, and François, with a pleased, child-like smile, hobbled after him, his wan face more feeble, more idiotic in the moonlight.

"But — why are you here?" asked Dan Smith. "It is not the road. Where you go, François?"

"Not on de road, no," cried the fiddler eagerly. "We come in de trees, ma violin and I. And we make de moosic. De trees, dey dance. *Oui*, de trees, dey dance," he affirmed. "If de moon make de light, den de trees dey dance. We like to make de trees to dance, ma violin and I. Good moosic, ma violin," he added, nodding proudly over the strings.

"You come to see me?" queried Dan Smith, sitting down upon the threshold of the cabin.

The fiddler, standing before him, see-sawed from

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side to side, as if he were keeping time to some unplayed rhythm in his foolish brain.

"No, not to see you." He tried to remember. "To see M'sieu in de big house." The terror seemed to come back to him. "Somebody come in de dark," he spoke low, looking about him fearfully, and came closer to Dan Smith. "He look at us and he go away. Oh, M'sieu, we have much fear, ma violin and I."

"No, François," said the artist, pacifyingly, not understanding the fiddler's meaning. "Nobody come. If you go to see M'sieu Huntworth, it is better to go now. It is late, François."

"*Oui*, it is late," assented the fiddler. "We go now, ma violin and I."

He shuffled away obediently. Dan Smith rose, and walked with him to where the trail began through the trees.

"You can rest here, if you wish, François," he said, indicating the cabin with a kindly nod, when he had pointed the way.

"No, no." The fiddler's brows contracted, petulantly. "It is late. We go now, ma violin and I. Good moosic, eh, M'sieu?" he insisted.

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"Good music, François," said Dan Smith.

As if to prove his words, François pressed the smooth wood under his chin, and began to play.

"We make de trees to dance, ma violin and I," he called back over his shoulder.

Dan Smith walked back to the cabin, and sat down again upon the threshold. From the distance he could hear the braver, scraping notes of François' fiddle, and he listened, self-forgetful, until they died away under the soft wash of the waves upon the shore. By degrees his mind, freed of the moment's gentler abstraction, turned back upon itself and upon its pitiless problem. The human kindness and the peace that had come with it vanished before the old inward struggle. His lithe body settled forward as if under the weight of the still undislodged burden. His elbow rested upon his knee, and the hand that propped his bowed head covered and uncovered nervously his mouth and chin.

"François *bon homme*," he repeated bitterly. "Yes, he is better than I. He hurt nobody." He remembered the fiddler's plaintive words. "I not wish to hurt," he pleaded, and there was a pause.

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The splash of the water was loud in the night silence. "But it is will'," he said, straightening up with hardly won conviction. "Oh, I am not a man," he cried, a second later, in complete despair. "I am two half-men, an' they fight, an' the fate they laugh."

He looked up at the great dome of the heavens with its calm moon, riding high above him, and its countless stars.

"After all," he whispered. "We are so li'l, he an' I. The whole worl,' it is so li'l. What does it matter?"

Something of the night something of limitless immensity, of unfathomable peace, of infinite grandeur wrought upon him in that moment, and his upturned face was calm, his eyes filled with dreams. But the spell of it gradually wore away. Petty memory came back to harass him. He searched along his belt.

"It is possible that I kill him to-night, when he hit the candle an' make all to be dark." He drew the long hunting knife from its sheath, and held the blade up to the light. "You are here, all the time. My hand move quick, an' see, it is

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all over. The fate they give him to me." He made a rapid, cunning pass, watching the light run up and down the curving steel. Then he hid it quickly in its sheath, shivering. "I cannot," he groaned. "How pale he look," he added after a moment. "Why kill a man who have a soul that die already?"

He sunk lower, bent into an almost indistinguishable, formless blotch upon the moonlit threshold.

"Li'l' brown girl," he sobbed. "Why you love me? Why you mak me to love you? Why you show me the happiness that I can not touch?" The black mass of him shook unrestrainedly. "My li'l' brown girl."

The minutes passed rapidly. The moon swung on in the heavens, and in its light the waves below were like silver goblets, crowned with iridescent foam, that clashed good health and long life to a glorious world. The shadows flitted in weird, ghostly shapes as the light, gusty wind swept the trees and the undulating stretches of grass. But still he sat bowed, unheeding, seemingly lifeless in the unreal light.

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At last he jerked himself up, and sprang to his feet decisively.

"It is weakness," he declared, folding his arms and tramping back and forth restlessly. "He is my father. I know it now. I lak him. What does it matter? It is the duty," he argued rapidly. "I am an Indian. He mak her, my mother, Gleam o' Dawn, to die. I am her son. He mus' be punish'. He mus'—"

He broke off and listened. The big bay was stamping restively. Almost as Dan Smith paused, a low, alarmed whinnying grew into a loud neigh.

"Some one come." Stealthily, he tiptoed to the corner of the cabin, every sense sharpened. He glanced at the moon. It was late, nearly midnight. Perhaps The Wind had been fooled by the rattle of the autumn leaves. But The Wind was a wise horse with a shrewd ear. It was probably a roaming animal. No! Dan Smith stiffened, holding his breath. A tiny light, low, near the ground, appeared and disappeared among the trees. It came nearer, growing in size and in intensity. Some one was coming along the trail. Dan Smith bent low, his ear to the ground. He

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could hear the sound of slow, measured steps. They grew louder, and crackled in the dry thicket at the edge of the woods. The swinging lantern emerged into the bordering strip of shadow, and its flame made changing circles of light about a pair of short legs that advanced firmly, steadily toward the moonlight and the cabin. Bewilderment became expectancy on the half of the artist's face which was lit by the moon. The figure left the sable shroud behind, and came out into the night luster that dimmed the lantern glow. Dan Smith fell back, and leaned against the front wall of the cabin, concealed in an instant from his unexpected visitor. His upturned face was like polished metal; his uplifted hand was clenched.

"He come," he whispered. "It is will'. The fate they give him again to me."

Swiftly, noiselessly, he stole back to the threshold and sat down, his dry throat gulping nervously. He felt at his belt. Then he slouched back against the sagging open door, and rolled a cigarette with shaking fingers. Mr. Huntworth came around the corner of the cabin with the same steady, unhurried steps. He saw the seemingly

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nonchalant figure in the doorway, and he hesitated.

"Good evening, Smith," he said quietly.

Dan Smith looked up from his cigarette. He rose with ostentatious leisureliness.

"*Bon soir, M'sieu,*" he returned suavely, and, scratching a match on the door, he lit the cigarette. "It is a beautiful night, is it not so?"

There was restraint in his voice and manner as well as in his words. There was no simulated surprise at Huntworth's appearance. He blew upward a thick cloud of smoke from his lips, and waited. Doubt, inward struggle, subtle questioning; these were all past. It was man to man now.

If Mr. Huntworth felt the foreboding change in the stranger's manner he gave no evidence of it. He came forward deliberately.

"Yes," he acquiesced. "Shall we go inside?"

"If M'sieu wish." Dan Smith stepped aside, and Huntworth passed in, his broad shoulders uncompromisingly erect, his eyes looking straight ahead. Dan Smith followed him with a leisurely swagger.

Mr. Huntworth placed the lantern upon the table, and turned upon the artist with a quickness

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that was unusual to him. Indeed the whole man seemed transformed. The customary tired droop of his mouth had become a grim straight line. The mild, blue eyes were wide open, and their gaze was steady, commanding. There was an unaccustomed rigidity about his stalwart body, as if it were infused with new vitality, backed by solid resolution. The two men confronted each other, dumb, motionless. The shadows of the lantern, with its crossing wires, quivered in unsteady, impish bands across the floor, and joined the dusk of the half-lit corners, while near the doorway the yellow, uncertain light broke before the soft radiance which slanted inward across the threshold. Huntworth backed slowly around the table until his shape, in grotesque exaggeration, appeared upon the further wall.

"Now, Smith," he said, with quiet sternness. "I want you to tell me what you know."

Dan Smith flicked the ash from his cigarette with easy carelessness. The tremble had gone from his hand, and the old, reckless, daredevil light was in his eyes. His composure matched Huntworth's, but he said nothing. The two per-

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sonal forces, all their latent strength brought suddenly into play, joined in silent struggle. The uncouth room, unstable, unsubstantial in the wavering light, intensified the clashing power with its contrasting background.

"I don't like to come to you this way," Huntworth went on. "I owe you a good deal. I've liked you from the start. But,"—the sternness returned—"this ' fortune-telling business. I've got to understand about it, Smith. I've got to know what's back of it. It's a matter of life and death to me."

"Life — or death," repeated Dan Smith. He shrugged his shoulders. There was again the uncertain, quivering pause. This time it was Dan Smith whom the unbearable silence forced to speech.

"That which I tell to-night, from the card," he demanded, "it is true?"

The abrupt question made the older man falter for an instant, but he bowed his head.

"Yes," he assented.

"Where is it we stop?"

Again Mr. Huntworth hesitated. It was as if

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the memory of the telling, or the memory of the story itself caught at his throat.

"You had told about — about my fighting the Indian for the girl."

Dan Smith's mouth curled in a whimsical smile, half humorous, half scornful.

"I not say you fight for the girl," he said, ironically. "But it is true."

In spite of himself the stern but kindly face before him made it hard for him to go on.

"You marry the girl. She is name'— Gleam o' Dawn." He lingered tenderly over his mother's name. "It is true?"

Again Mr. Huntworth bowed. The artist stirred forward a step. The story seemed to harden his antagonism, to mold his life-long hatred.

"You have a son," he growled. "He have not two year. You go away; never come back. It is true?" came the relentless question.

Again, more slowly, this time, Huntworth nodded. His face was white, but his body was held inflexible by vise-like control and his eyes stared at the younger man with feverish brightness.

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"Gleam o' Dawn weep. Her heart it break. She die."

"I didn't know," groaned Huntworth.

"The son, he live. He is outcas', nobody. He is tol' to hate the man, his father, who kill his mother, who mak him to be nobody."

There was only the table between them now, for Dan Smith had advanced unconsciously until his hands rested against the rough edge. Scarcely understanding, he saw expectancy that was half dread, hope that was half terror, come into the face that a moment before had seemed worn threadbare by suffering. Dan Smith was past understanding in that moment. The memory of boyish days barbed with bitter hatred; the primitive, savage desire for revenge that made his blood hot within him; the accumulation of all the lonely later years, through which he had wandered, his sensitive nature learning by torturing degrees its inward disgrace, its mongrel inferiority — years softened only by a mad worship of the mother, beautiful in the haze of childish memory, years hardened and embittered, most of all, by the knowledge of the father, from the thought of

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whom he revolted — these stirred him now and wrought upon him and possessed him wholly. The past had overcome the present. Fate led him, unresisting.

"The boy grow up. One day he meet his father. He not know him, but Lynx-eye show him. He —"

A sibilant gasp startled him, and silenced him for an instant. The old man's head lurched forward, his eyes searching the artist's face, his lips twitching in unuttered speech. Wonder changed to belief, belief to certainty, and with the last, the iron will seemed to give sharply under the relieved strain.

"My son." There was pitiful joy in the heart-breaking sob. "My son."

His big hands were lifted tremblingly and covered his eyes. His broad body shook, as with palsy. The shadow on the farther wall became a shapeless, quaking black mass.

"My son," he whispered again.

For a few seconds Dan Smith's tall form was like stone. The sudden breaking, the pathetic weakness, elicited his ever-ready sympathy.

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Something of his affection for this man who had been his friend revived in him, and with it the old conflict. His hand, groping upward to his throat, touched something hard under his shirt. Instantly he stifled his gentler instincts. The time was his. He had waited indecisively too long already. The fate willed it. He tried to remember his mother's face in the picture, but he looked away from the man, his life-long enemy and his friend, before he could speak.

"He — he swear to kill you. You kill Gleam o' Dawn; you mus' be punish'. It is will'."

"My son."

"Ah, but it is difficul'!" cried Dan Smith, his voice breaking with emotion. "I lak you, M'sieu. I save your life an' I am glad." He stopped short.

"My son," moaned Huntworth, unheeding.

Dan Smith's hands covered his ears. He glanced upward, agonizingly. Then, with sudden panting breath, he tore the knife from its sheath. He did not dare to look at the glittering blade. He crept slowly around the table, so slowly

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that it seemed as if each step was dragged against some hidden power.

"I mus' do it," he muttered. "I mus' do it."

At the corner of the table he halted. Then with a wild, incoherent cry, he raised the shaking knife and lunged forward. At the piercing cry, Huntworth's hands dropped from his face. He saw the oncoming figure, the distorted face, the gleaming knife. He started back, almost falling. His hand tugged at his pocket, and swept out before him with a flash of light. The knife slipped from Dan Smith's fingers and fell crashing to the floor. He was staring down the shining barrel of a revolver which was leveled at his heart. And so they stood for a full moment, this white father and his half-breed son.

At last Dan Smith threw back his head with a low, hysterical laugh.

"Shoot, M'sieu," he demanded hoarsely. "You kill the mother. Kill the son. I am glad to die."

Huntworth could only shake his head. He tried to speak, but no words came. In the lengthening silence the growing wonder, doubt, respect in the

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artist's face gave it a calm, like a sudden lull which may follow the maddest gust of a tempest.

"I only want time, my boy," Mr. Huntworth's dry lips found words at last. "Time to talk — time to right myself with you — if I can. God help me, I can't right myself with her." The deep sorrow on the old man's face was shot with sharp pain. "Pick up your knife, my son." The artist obeyed. "Put it on the table." A second later the knife lay beside the lantern.

Dan Smith stood erect and waited. The revolver was lowered almost instantly. Mr. Huntworth put it down carefully beside the knife.

"I only want time," he repeated slowly. "I can trust you, I guess. You're my son. My son!" He swayed heavily against the table. "Is there a chair?" he asked weakly. "I'd like to sit down."

Without a word Dan Smith brought the camp-chair and opened it for him. Then he returned to the farther corner of the table, and there faced the older man again with proud deference. His face was impassive, showing nothing of the contending undercurrents within him, of scarcely sof-

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tened hate, of admiration; of primitive savagery, of fair, just impulses; of bitter memory and of ready affection.

The old man sank back in the chair. For a moment he seemed to watch the bobbing flame of the lantern, but the far away look in his eyes passed beyond the lantern, beyond the narrow walls, back, perhaps, through many years that were gone.

"I only want a little time," he said again. "After that you can punish me. I don't blame you for feeling the way you do. I ought to be punished."

He raised himself in the chair as if to brace himself for an ordeal. Something of his former poise settled upon his face. There was one fight left to him, a fight for his son.

"But I've been punished." The earnest voice, the furrowed face were pathetically convincing. "There is a God who punishes," he added, with profound conviction.

Dan Smith's brows knitted in a perplexed frown. Then his face softened. He remembered. "I will repay, saith the Lord." She had said it.

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Mr. Huntworth saw the gentler look and, visibly encouraged, he went on anxiously as if he feared to lose any advantage he had gained.

"I loved her, my boy," he said. "I didn't half know it then. I've known it better every year I've lived." He felt the doubt in the younger man's judging eyes. "It's true," he urged quickly. "I was young then and happy-go-lucky. I wasn't so unlike you, my boy. I—I think that was the reason I liked you so. You reminded me of myself as I used to be. As I used to be," he repeated. "I've never been happy since. I'm—I'm happier now, my boy, now, than I've been in thirty years," he declared defiantly. "I'm glad to have it out."

The vehemence faded quickly before the expressionless face, the patient attention that seemed only dignified sufferance. Depression, a sense of complete defeat, crept over him, but he shook it off, and began again.

"I can remember when you were born, my boy." His voice was old and tremulous. "I called you Dan at first, after me, you know. And then, one day, you put out your hand for a feather I had

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and she said — she said to call you 'Red Feather.'" Memory seemed to overwhelm the man. It was some time before he could go on. "I can see you now as you were then," he murmured, his eyes downcast. "Dannie boy I used to call you. You were — well, never mind," he interrupted himself sharply, conquering his emotion with an effort. "I loved you, boy. You're right, perhaps, not to believe it. But, I tell you, few fathers are as proud of their children as I was of you."

He peered appealingly into Dan Smith's inscrutable face. In that moment he gave up any fugitive hope of moving his son's compassion, of winning his forgiveness. But he nerved himself up, doggedly, to go on to the dreary end.

"Well, I threw it all away," he went on, more evenly. "I began to long for my own people. One night I had a good chance and I got away. Perhaps I thought I'd come back. I don't know. I didn't think much in those days, and I didn't look very far ahead. If I wanted a thing I had it. That's the way I came to the tribe, starving. That's the way I became an Indian. That's the

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way I was married, and that's the way I sneaked off for the sake of seeing a white man again. Well," he continued with a pathetic fortitude, "I had a hard time scraping a living for the next two or three years, and when things got to be a little easier and I was bossing a lumber camp of my own, I was pretty well tied. I began to think more, though, about you and about — her, but I kept putting off going back. I've been putting it off ever since."

His big hand that rested upon the table doubled convulsively until it was a hard mallet of drawn flesh. When he spoke again the whole vigor of his better manhood, chastened by the years, was behind his words.

"But I've suffered, and I've learned. I was a scoundrel, but I know it and I know why. I want you to listen. I want you to be a better man than your father. God, how I've longed to see you, to tell you this. Never mind. Listen now, and never forget it, never, you understand. Every man's got a conscience that he'll have to reckon with. Don't think you can run away from it. You can't. And when a man's married, he's mar-

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ried. I know that a lot of white men think, and a few of them say — I knocked one down once for saying it — that a woman that's colored don't count. It's a lie, the damndest lie that was ever breathed. She was my wife. God Himself can't change that, and He wouldn't if He could. It's His law and it's right. A woman's a woman, white or red. A wife's a wife. And a son's a son. You're my son. You can hate me. I don't blame you. But you can't get away from the truth."

The color had come back into the sallow cheeks, a hectic flush that began to die away with the last stirring words of the man's life lesson. The broad body sagged back. The hand on the table unclasped.

"That's about all, my boy," he said at last. "I haven't done much to prove it. I found a man once who was going to visit the tribe. He was a priest, trustworthy. He's the only one who knows anything about it. I was a coward and ashamed. I sent all the money I had then to you and her, by him." He hesitated. "She must have been dead by then," he added quietly. "He didn't tell me that." He paused again. "Well, then I

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made a will which leaves practically everything to you. But I can't buy your love. I know that, and I can't make up with money for what I did. I can't bring her back and make her happy again — she was happy — and I can't — well — it's all I could do now, and I've done that little anyhow. Then" — the words trailed on slowly — "then the Indian came to me, Lynx-Eye we used to call him, the man I fought with for her. He always hated me and I him, but, in his way — a better way than mine, I guess — he loved her. Well, I took care of him for her sake, and he was all right till you came. Then — well — I understand."

He glanced miserably at Dan Smith's face which was unchanging in the yellow light.

"I've always been true to her." He waited a few seconds. Then, "That's all, my boy," he said. He stirred wearily as if soul and body had been cramped. A new eagerness sprang into his eyes, beseeching appeal that was wistful with fear of denial. "But — but I'd like to know about you," he said.

The request caught Dan Smith unawares. Not a single movement of the old man's face or body

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during his recital had escaped the artist's keen eyes, and every inflection of each word that had been spoken had registered its impression upon him. Under the unchanging surface he had swayed between conflicting reasoning and emotion between the white blood and the red within him, between the simple savage teaching of his boyhood and more complex, civilized training of his later years, between the memory of his mother and the person of his father. The unexpected turn to himself, in the midst of all this confused him. He was blankly mute.

"I don't know much about you, you know," pleaded Huntworth. "And after all — you're my son."

Dan Smith relaxed.

"What is it that you wish to know, M'sieu?"

"I'd like to know everything you've done since — since you were a baby." Huntworth pressed forward eagerly, gratitude in his face at the artist's implied assent. "I'd listen a year if you'd let me."

Dan Smith felt the pathos of the appeal, its complete sincerity.

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"I grow up with the tribe after my mother die," he began simply. He saw the sadness of the old man's face and went on rapidly, omitting the more detailed story of his boyhood. "I ride an' I fish an' I hunt, an' by 'n' bye I draw picture. One day,— I am tall an' strong, almos' a man — a white man come to the tribe. He stay long time — so long the hair on his face grow thick before he go. He watch me, many time, when I draw, an' he say to me that I mus' go away an' study, that I have much talen'. He give me this." Dan Smith pointed to the Bible that lay on the farther edge of the table. "An' when he go they tell me he leave much money."

Huntworth's momentary amazement and incredulity were crowded out instantly by the acute desire to listen, to concentrate all his mind upon the man before him.

"*Eh bien*, I lak to draw, M'sieu," Dan Smith went on, growing interested himself in the first telling of his own story. "An' soon, I tak the money an' I go away, where the white man tell me — across the gret water. It is hard at first, for I can speak li'l' English, but I learn the

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French in the beeg, bright city. *Alors* I study, an' the white man is right. I have the talen'," he said naively. "The people they lak the picture that I paint. But I am tire' of the city an' I wish to see the tree again. After many year I return — p'raps it is a year ago, M'sieu. The winter come, an' I rest in the beeg city here, New York. I not speak the English well. There is the Indian an' the French which make me confuse', but the people they are kin' to me for my picture. They not know that which I am." There was a glimpse of the old depression on his face.

"*Eh bien*, I come here to paint the tree, M'sieu," he ran on. "An' I feel lak I am at home again. An' then — an' then, I fin' you, M'sieu." He stopped, brought face to face again with the present which, for a moment, he had forgotten.

"You sold your pictures?" asked Huntworth. There was keen pride in his voice. "You made a success of it?"

"Oh, yes, M'sieu. I — I save enough," he went on thoughtfully, "to pay back all the money you give me. I think I can not be happy till I return it."

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A spasm of pain blotted out the pride in Huntworth's face.

"No, no, my boy," he begged. "You mustn't think of that. It was so little for me to do, so little." He paused. "But I suppose you hated it, coming from me," he said bitterly.

"Yes, M'sieu," said Dan Smith.

"Well, go on, my boy," Huntworth urged after a moment. "I want to hear the rest of it. How did you know Pierre?"

"He knew me," Dan Smith replied readily. "He see the red mark on my neck where I fall on a knife. My mother drop me, she is so — *Eh bien*, M'sieu," he hurried on gently. "He see a picture also, a picture you paint —"

Huntworth gasped with astonishment.

"A picture I painted?"

"Yes, M'sieu, a picture of her, of my mother. He tell me who you are, M'sieu, an' I say — I say, I kill you. But" — he faltered, — "but I lak you, M'sieu. I not know what to do." The memory of his struggle sent a vibrant thrill into his voice. "I not know what to do."

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"I understand," broke in Huntworth. He stretched out one hand, its fingers working nervously. "The picture," he whispered. "Have you got the picture?"

Dan Smith looked down into the worn, anxious, pleading face, and he raised his hand mechanically to his breast. Slowly, as if undecided, he drew forth the strip of birch-bark mounted on the wood.

Huntworth's fingers clutched it, and bent it to the light. His broad body shook in a racking sob as he looked at the gentle face he had painted. Every line had a memory for him, and the tranquil dark eyes looked upon him now after all the years with the simple, trusting love he had found in them, and had given them crudely in the picture. Tears, more eloquent than words, rushed into his eyes, and slipped unheeded down his ashen face. He bowed his head and kissed the painted lips.

Dan Smith watched him breathlessly, and his face was soft with a wonderful compassion.

At last Huntworth drew his arm quickly across his eyes and looked up. He laid the picture

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gently, reverently, upon the table, and his face seemed stronger for the tears, transfigured by a new radiance.

"I'm satisfied," he said quietly. "I've seen her again. Perhaps, somewhere, she understands." He choked suddenly. "I've found my son," he went on in terse, tense sentences. "And I'm proud of him. I helped him a little. He's a better man than I am. I'm ready to die."

He picked up the artist's knife from the table. He handed it, with something of his old command, to Dan Smith.

"Now you can punish me, my son," he said.

Huntworth sank back in the chair, his eyes closed. Dan Smith stared vacantly at the blade that once more gleamed in his hand. Then, with a low cry, he wheeled about, and sent the knife whirling unerringly through the doorway, and sank upon his knees at his father's feet.

Huntworth bent over him dazed, and touched timidly the head that lay, half hidden in long, sinewy arms, upon his lap.

"My son," he whispered, his face suddenly glorified. "Dannie boy."



"Huntworth's fingers clutched it, and bent it to the light."

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His big hands wandered to the broad shoulders below, and clasped about them uncertainly. Then he broke down utterly.

"Dannie boy," he sobbed. "Dannie boy."

CHAPTER IX

THE CIRCLE OF LIGHT

It was long after midnight. An hour had passed, unheeded. The moon still poured its stream of molten gold up the reach from the sand and across the threshold. Within, the pigmy lantern flame swelled and strutted upon the rough, board table. In the sky dome above the stars still swung through illimitable spaces, telling silently of infinite will, immutable law, an eternal plan. From under the narrow cabin roof came the murmur of human voices, scarcely audible beyond the doorway, speaking of newly devised to-morrows. And while they talked, the calm splendor outside was spotted, at the side of the cabin near its single window, by a scarcely moving, crouching shadow.

At last a chair scraped harshly on the floor within. Moving feet clattered noisily. The shadow by the window disappeared. The voices

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grew louder, and the two figures loomed blackly in the moonlit doorway.

Huntworth passed out, the lantern in his hand, and looked up at the clear heavens. Something from that glance left an indefinable, sobering impress upon him.

"We'd better not plan too far ahead," he said with a sigh. "I'm an old man, my boy. I haven't many years left."

"But, yes," broke in Dan Smith, with ready optimism. "You live long time, p'raps more long than I. We cannot know."

Huntworth smiled wearily and shook his head.

"You'll come to-morrow?" he asked after a moment.

"Yes, M'sieu."

"For good?" urged Huntworth, eager for assurance.

"It is for you to say, M'sieu," said the artist gently. "I am your son, an' The Win', he is your servant. It is settle'."

Huntworth's glance ran over the erect, lithe figure proudly.

"Thank you, my boy," he said.

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He was loath to go, and stood wistfully watching the tall man who leaned in the doorway, as if he feared that, once he turned his back, the figure would vanish, never to come back to him.

"P'raps we paint together, M'sieu." The boy in the artist was planning ahead again delightedly.

"I'd like to." Huntworth caught the mood for an instant. "I believe I could do it — now."

Dan Smith's quick mind ran from painting to the picture by the spring, and from that — to her. They had spoken already of her.

"And Nini?" he asked softly, stepping down beside Huntworth.

"I'll tell you about her some day — not to-night," the old man answered quickly with tired decision. "You two — it is strange — well, never mind. You will understand." Huntworth hesitated. Then he put one hand on the artist's shoulder. "If you love her, my boy," he said with impressive earnestness, "marry her. If you marry her, love her."

"Yes, M'sieu," said Dan Smith soberly.

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Huntworth put out his hand and the artist seized it with a strong grasp.

"Good night, Dan."

"Good night, M'sieu."

For some seconds they stood, the two pairs of blue eyes meeting steadily.

"Good night, my father." Dan Smith whispered the strange words.

Huntworth's grip hardened. He looked away, his eyes glistening.

"For he, my son," he repeated, "who was dead, is alive again." He choked suddenly. Dan Smith felt the hand that held his tighten convulsively.

"Good night, Dan," Huntworth said again, and turned away. At the corner of the cabin he looked back over his shoulder. The tall figure had not moved. There were no more words to say, but his hand waved its mute message. Instantly Dan Smith answered with a waving salute.

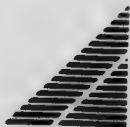
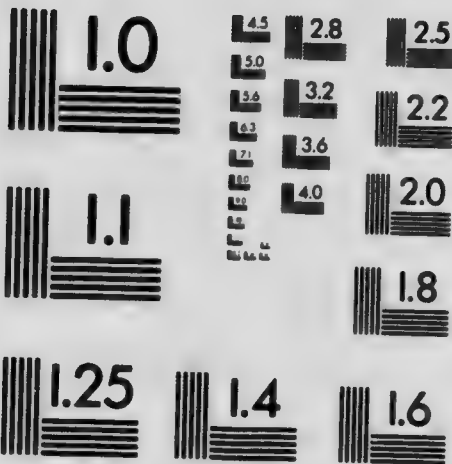
"Good night, my father." The voice came, soft, musical, throbbing with impulsive affection.

The words filled Huntworth's empty, lonely



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heart and rose, chokingly, to his throat. He swallowed fiercely and strode on. The vibrant voice echoed within him with every step, "My father"—"My father"—"My father." He crossed the stretch of deep, lush grass, and entered the woods. He did not trust himself to turn again. The tall figure, its long arms waving forgiveness, understanding, friendship, was still before his eyes. The assuring words followed him, repeating themselves on his moving lips. His whole being pulsed, revived, with the unbelievable, undeniable, wonderful truth. It was enough. He turned into the trail, his broad shoulders proudly erect, the lantern swinging, unnoticed, at his side. A few steps within the tangle he looked upward, through the shadowy traceries of the trees; and the moonlight, sifting through, found a peace upon his face that men, who had known Daniel Huntworth through all the years, had never seen. Thanksgiving was there, also, and it seemed that, for the moment, his mumbling lips were reverent with unaccustomed prayer.

As he tramped on his step was lighter, more youthfully resolute. The beauty of the night

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stirred him in a new, strange way. He found joy in the palpitating silence, and he was glad he was alone. He had found his son — such a son — such a comrade — *his* son. Somehow he had won his son's forgiveness. Somehow he had triumphed over the boy's Indian blood, Indian training, long years of Indian hatred. He grew very humble. He never could have done it alone. A greater Power than he had been there to bend the boy's will, to make love stronger than hate. A dim, faraway memory came to the old man — a glowing fire-place in his boyhood home, a gentle woman's face, and a book not unlike that one which lay on the table in the little cabin. That memory had brought back, unconsciously, the long forgotten words he had quoted before the cabin door. He repeated them again now. "For he, my son, who was dead is alive again." His eyes moistened. He forgot the hard, scoffing, unsatisfying years. His head bowed.

"Oh, God, I believe," he whispered.

His opening eyes watched the flickering light of the lantern, banded by black, grotesque shadows, dance across his path. It reminded him of the

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fire-light into which, as a boy, he had stared dreaming, while his own mother read or talked to him. It did not seem very long ago. But she had been dead many years. He had not seen the old home since he left it buoyantly to make his fortune. And now he, Dan Huntworth, was an old man. What an empty waste it had been, that fortune-making, with his conscience dogging at his heels constantly with the memory of his mistake! He had tried to make it right, but he had been a coward. It was better now, now that he had found his son. His son! The dancing light on his path became again an illusion to him, and he dreamed of the future once more, staring at the old fire-light. He would lavish everything upon Dan, his son Dan. The boy had won his success already. The old man's heart stood still for an instant at the thought. But he would make him the greatest painter in the world, he planned with new hopefulness. The boy was young. After all he was only beginning. From now on he should lack nothing. And, year by year, he, Daniel Huntworth, would watch him grow, and, perhaps, by and by, he could hold

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up his head proudly, and say: "Yes, I made a mistake, but a good has come from it. My son stands for her and for me. We are united in him."

The light danced on before him, and with it his dreams, elusive, like mocking will-o'-the-wisps. He longed to seize them, to make them true, but always they ran on, beckoning, with the bobbing light, beyond his reach, until at last they were lost in the mellow radiance that covered the ground, where the trail widened into an open circle.

Huntworth faltered suddenly as they disappeared, but it was not their loss that benumbed his limbs, that made his breathing shorter, more rapid. From the shadows at his left came a low, crooning, human monotone. There was no melody, but the words were distinct.

"Fair as de leele, joyous an' free,
Light av de prayree home was she.
Avree wan dat knew her felt de jantil pow'r
Av Rosalie, de prayree flow'r."

It was the song he had sung as a boy. It was the song which he had taught some of the

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young bucks of the tribe. It was the song he had sung for her and had forgotten. Did it return now to haunt him? It came nearer. No, it was real. The foundations of his dreams and hopes crumbled. The peace of the moonlit circle became a mad, menacing mockery. It was Pierre Lynx-Eye, hate, death. His heart was cold with terror. His feet seemed rooted to the ground, there at the edge of the clearing. Nearer yet came the voice, and his straining eyes saw a crouching shadow emerge into the light only a few yards away. He stared, fascinated, as it advanced toward him. The dull, inexorable monotone beat, deafeningly, in his ears. Then the wave of terror receded. His head cleared. He dropped the lantern and leaned back in the semidarkness of the trail, his hand fumbling for his pocket. He found it. It was empty. The revolver was lying, where he had left it, upon the table in the little cabin.

The singing had stopped with his quick movement. A long body hurled itself upon him, and a sinewy hand closed over his arm. Crouching backward, Huntworth caught the lantern from

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the ground, and swung it with all his strength, straight at the eyes that glowed in the shadow. There was a shattering smash of glass, a savage snarl, and only the night sheen, through the edge of trees, remained. Huntworth had plunged forward, his fists clenched, following the blow, but instantly he felt his arms pinioned in a grasp that bit into the flesh. The Indian, dodging, had caught the impact of the lantern upon his shoulder.

Almost before he knew it Huntworth was forced out into the open. He tried to marshal his confused thoughts for action, but on every side they met a blind wall. No argument would avail, he knew, nor would any appeal stir the heart, cold with hate, seeking nothing but revenge. There were only long stretches of silent night to hear his cries for help. In his twisting, useless struggles under the relentless hands, he looked upward. The moon hung high above the bordering trees they had left behind. It was the same moon that had shone, a little while before, upon his son in front of the cabin. He saw again the waving hand and heard the voice, "Good night, my

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father." He flung himself with a mighty effort upon the lands that bound him, but they only stiffened into tighter bands of steel.

Before him now, upon the ground, he saw the long, ugly shadow crossing his own, and he felt the hissing breath upon his neck. His old antagonism sharpened within him. His old hate for this man and a deeper, more primitive race-hatred swept over him with blinding rage. In a flash he was stripped of every gentler thought, every softer emotion. His soul died. Savage wrath obsessed him. He became a desperate animal, fighting for life, eager to kill, as cruel, as elemental as the untamed Indian behind him. He ceased struggling. The veins at his temples were swollen and knotted. The nails of his clenched hands cut, unnoticed, into his flesh. His teeth clicked, and his set lips grew dry and parched. And so the two figures reached the very center of the clearing. Not a word had been spoken.

They halted suddenly. Huntworth's breath sung, with anger and with physical pain, through his teeth, as his arms were wrenched, almost torn

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from their sockets. He felt a hand at his pocket, and heard a low grunt of satisfaction. He lunged forward, and, strangely, found himself free. With a cry of brutal fury he whirled about. Something fell at his feet, something that glittered in the moonlight.

"Red Feather say — be fair," said the harsh, guttural voice. The Indian stood a few yards from him. "We fight."

For a second Huntworth stared, scarcely understanding, unbelieving. Then he stooped, warily, as if he expected a trick, and picked up the knife. He felt the blade, watching the shadowy outline of the Indian; ready for attack. The edge was sharp.

"We fight — again." The Indian crouched and his face, upturned to the heavens, was calm, lit by a mystical, fanatical smile. "For Gleam o' Dawn."

The two old men faced each other in the fateful stillness. The years rolled backward. The surrounding trees became the silent people of the tribe, gathered to watch the struggle, and some-

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where behind them, hidden from view, weeping perhaps for one or for the other, was Gleam o' Dawn, the Indian girl whom they both loved.

They crept forward, nearer, nearer; crouching, unreal shadows in the pale moonlight. Then out of the bow and string tension, a long body shot like an arrow. There was a flash of steel, a ringing clash of metal, and the tall figure leaped backward. Again there were the slowly moving, advancing, retreating figures, but only for a second. Another attack, more vicious than the first sent the broader, defending form reeling backward, evading the blow. He was still on his feet, however, the knife gleaming in his hand, his sturdier form settling back solidly, seemingly impregnable. Again came the attack, more wary this time, from the side, and again the white man gave ground, but remained unscathed. There was delay now. Little by little the broader figure retreated with slow, short steps before the Indian's advance. Back, back, back he led him, as if overcome by fear, unready for the struggle. The grouping trees seemed to rock forward noisily, as if expectant of quick defeat for the white man. One

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backward step more, only half a step. The tall figure came onward, as if unsuspecting. That half-step was only a lure. With a sudden leap the white man was upon him, the knife falling in a short, unexpected stroke. It was the old trick, but the Indian had not forgotten. The descending blade halted a few inches from his breast, his hand clutching the thick wrist. His own knife flashed through the air. There was a thud, a sharp cry of agony. The broad shoulder twisted itself free from the clinging blade. The old decision was reversed. The Indian had won.

The dark, shadowed band grouped about the moonlit arena did not stir. There was only inexorable silence. The old fight was ended. The new fight began, a fight to the death. With a fierce, gasping shout, the white man, maddened by pain, threw himself upon his adversary, twisting his wrist free. His arm, half numbed by the blow, clung desperately about the Indian's waist. The two figures swayed every muscle taut and straining, the rapid breath hot upon the other's face. There was a gasping exclamation. Only the hoarse breathing in the silence,

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the snapping strain of bone and muscle, the muffled clashing of the two still powerful bodies, told of accumulated hatred, of savage, blood-lustful rage. One knife slipped free and fell in a vicious blow. One figure quivered, pressed downward. There was a grating groan, but the body pulled itself upward again. There was another glittering stroke and another and another. The figures seemed to fall apart, swinging, reeling. Hands tore blindly at faces, throats, necks. They swirled together again, biting, clawing, kicking, foaming, moaning. Wild screams, inhuman snarls of anger and suffering echoed horribly in the silence. The two bodies slipped to their knees, becoming one in a black, swaying, disfiguring blotch upon the circle of mild light. Arms were raised more slowly, shaking with weakness. The hacking blades made slow, trembling tracks of glitter. There was a low, expulsive sigh. A body tumbled backward, and lay, a huddled heap, upon the ground. A tall figure staggered to its feet, with a rending cry of victory. Dimmed eyes stared upward unseeing. The cry trailed off in a hoarse, scarcely audible name.

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"Gleam o' Dawn."

The figure tottered drunkenly, lurched forward, and fell in a crumpled mass, one outstretched hand still gripping the blood-stained knife. The deep silence of the forest, the peaceful beauty of the serene heavens remained.

At last the silence was broken. The quavering notes of an old fiddle, far away at first, approached, and with it a mumbling, half-frightened, crooning voice. Where the farther trail that led to the distant big house on the hill opened into the cleared circle, the music ceased. The voice became articulate with glad surprise.

"See," it cried. "We are not lost, ma violin. It is the bright place again. We find the strange man and the little house. We tell him de trees dey dance, eh, ma violin? Good moosic, he say. Good —"

The voice faltered. The little fiddler bent over a body that lay in a pool of blood. He started backward. For a full moment he stood, gazing at the huddled form. Then he wrapped his arms protectingly about the worn fiddle, and tiptoed a wide circle around the gruesome splotch upon

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the ground. Once past it he hurried, almost running, peering back, terrified, over his shoulder. He vanished into the shadow, sobbing with fear.

A moment later one of the figures on the ground stirred slightly. A shaking head was raised. It sank back. Then the form pulled itself up painfully upon its knees, and dragged itself forward slowly. It stopped at last, kneeling in the bloody grass, leaning, unsteadily, over a glaring face half turned to the pallid light.

CHAPTER X

A NEW DAWN

THE light of the waning moon, more mystical as it faded, still slanted across the threshold of the little cabin. It transformed the worn, black, heavy door, which hung loosely, clinging to the rotting flooring, into a creamy curtain, bordered above by a triangle of dark, impenetrable shadow. The faint breeze had died away with the approach of the morning. The dreaming world lay in an expectant hush, and the soft wash of water upon the shore seemed only an echo of the even breathing of the man who lay stretched upon the bunk within.

The silence seemed palpable, a living, pulsing thing of dull gold and grotesque shadow, of cool, scarcely stirring breath; a thing centuries old, blessed by memory, beautiful in contentment. All at once it fled before a patter of feet in the long grass. The patter grew sharper as it reached the hard pebbly sand, and with it came throaty,

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incoherent sounds that shattered the peace with a warning of fear. A figure like a wraith passed the corner of the cabin. Then came noisy, frantic breathing, and a clatter upon the threshold.

"M'sieu," called a high-pitched, terrified voice.

The sleeping man awoke and rose upon his elbow, blinking at the bent shadow that trembled in the doorway. Then he leaped to his feet.

"*Eh bien*," he demanded gruffly. "What is it?"

The wizened figure tottered forward with a low trill of idiotic laughter.

"He is here, ma violin," chattered the fiddler. "We find him, eh, ma violin? Good moosic, he say. Good moosic. Good moosic."

"It is François." Dan Smith was thoroughly awake now. He remembered immediately all that had happened, before he had thrown himself upon the bunk — only a moment ago, it seemed to him.

"*Eh bien*, li'l' frien' of the fiddle," he cried, with all his old buoyancy. "Why is it that you return so quick? Is it that you not fin' M'sieu or —"

The little fiddler had come closer, peering fur-

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tively into the shadows. He reached out and touched the artist's arm, and his hand shook with fear.

"All blood," quavered the piping voice. "All blood. We lak not de blood, ma violin and I."

"What is it, François?" Dan Smith asked. "Have not fear. Tell me."

He crossed to the table, and, scratching a match, he lit a candle.

"Ah, M'sieu!" François moaned with delight as the sputtering light faded and grew again into a steady flame. "It is ver' bright now. We like it to be bright, r violin and I."

He pattered to the table, cringing, holding his thin hands to the flame.

"Ah, it is warm," he chuckled.

Dan Smith watched him in whimsical wonder. Then he walked to the door and looked out.

"It is late," he said, with an exclamation of surprise. "The morning it is near. I sleep an hour, p'raps two, p'raps more." He yawned and stretched out his arms. Then he wheeled upon the emaciated figure by the candle, growing perplexity on his face.

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"But where are you, my frien' of the fiddle, all the time?" he remarked, half to himself. "You lose yourself long time in the tree, François?" he asked.

"*Oui.* That is it." The fiddler nodded brightly. "We are lost, ma violin and I. Den" — he stopped, his wan eyes growing wide and staring. His body shuddered. "All blood," he whimpered, looking about him vacantly. "All blood. We like not de blood, ma violin and I. We run. We are lost again. Ah," his voice rose almost to a scream, as he covered his eyes, "All blood."

Dan Smith was by his side in an instant. He gripped his narrow shoulder firmly, and spun him around until the full light of the candle shone in his face, wrinkled with fear.

"What you mean?" commanded the artist. Then, more pityingly, as the fiddler shrank away from him, he added: "What mak you afraid, François?"

The fiddler crept back a step from the loosening hand. He ran his fingers uncertainly through his thin, gray hair. Then he laughed, cackling laughter.

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"It is nothing, M'sieu." He evaded the artist's glance for a second. Then he looked up guilelessly, his mouth open in a meaningless grin. He lifted one hand warningly. "Lissen, M'sieu," he chuckled mysteriously. "I am born on de day after a Sunday, but it was not a Monday."

"What day, François?" Dan Smith smiled again readily. After all it was only the crazy fiddler.

"It was Chris'muss day, M'sieu." The fiddler craned forward and whispered the words proudly. "We like de Chris'muss day, ma violin and I. All the world it is kind. It give us much. But," he added, sorrowfully, "it is onlee wance in wan long tam, M'sieu. Why is de Chris'muss day onlee wance in wan long tam, M'sieu?" he inquired with childish entreaty.

Dan Smith put his arm shelteringly about the fragile shoulders. The pity of it stirred him and crowded everything else, momentarily, from his heart.

"It does not matter, François," he said soothingly. "You mus' be ver' tire'." He half led, half carried the yielding little man to the bunk.

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"See, you sleep now, François. Me, I watch for the morning from the door. It is the las' time," he added joyously, half to himself.

François sat down obediently upon the edge of the bunk.

"De last tam," he repeated wonderingly. Then, snuggling the fiddle against his heart, he lay, his thin body curled up like a child's. "Ah, it is lak de home, eh, ma violin?" he murmured. "Lak de"—

"M'sieu — Dan Smith — Oh, M'sieu!" The soft, breathless voice rose and fell outside like the wail of a wind in the trees.

"Dan Smith — M'sieu." It came again, nearer, more appealing.

For a second the artist stood stiff, taut, listening. Then he ran headlong to the door. That voice had called to him in his dreams, and now, as in a dream, the dear, slender form came running to him—to him, Dan Smith, standing on the threshold of his little cabin. He stepped forward, unbelieving, and caught the swaying, panting girl in his outstretched arms. It was not a dream. It was she, warm, vital, clinging to him with

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quivering sobs. Reason left him in a mad shout of joy.

"Nini," he cried. His strong arms enfolded her and crushed her limp, unresisting body to his. He held her closer, closer, until his muscles trembled with the strain, and still his unleashed passion was unsatisfied. No nearness could be near enough. He bent over her, and swept her cheeks, her closed eyes, her lips with a whirlwind of kisses until he staggered breathless.

"Li'l' brown girl," he panted in a glory of triumphant love. "Li'l' brown girl. She is mine, now. I let her go never."

Nini struggled in his embrace. Her hand, tight against his shoulder, pressed with superhuman strength against him, forcing him from her.

"Oh, no, M'sieu," she whispered. He caught a darkening glimpse of her tearful, entreating, horror-stricken face, and his arms loosened. "You must run, M'sieu. Go quickly," she begged. "They are coming." She glanced back over her shoulder fearfully. "Please go, M'sieu."

"They come?" said Dan Smith stupidly.

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Then, realizing only that she was frightened, that he longed to comfort her, that he loved her, "What does it matter?" he cried, the power of his great love overwhelming him again. Once more he drew her to him, laughing at her futile resistance. "Oh, li'l' brown girl, what does it matter? I love you. I love you. An' I have the right to love you. I know it now. I think it is not fair to you, li'l' brown girl. I know that which I am, you see? But I am a fool. I am li'l', but my love it is beeg, more beeg than I. You tak my love, my Nini, an' with it me, is it not so?" The rush of words was checked. "You love me, li'l' brown girl?" he asked with impulsive doubt.

"Yes, yes, M'sieu, but —" Nini broke off sharply, listening. Then she fought herself loose from him desperately. "They are coming. I can hear them. It is not yet too late. Run, M'sieu, while there is time."

Dan Smith heard them also. He heard the murmur of many voices, the crashing of the underbrush.

"Who is coming? Why? Why mus' I run?"

A NEW DAWN

What is it, Nini?" He asked the questions quietly, uncomprehending, but sobered by the ominous sounds which reinforced the girl's terror.

"Oh, I knew you didn't do it." Nini restrained her quick joy lest it delay her words. "They found M'sieu. He is dead. They think — oh, it is horrible, M'sieu! — they think you did it. I came to warn you, M'sieu. I am afraid for you. They will kill you if they find you. Please go, M'sieu," she beseeched him.

Dan Smith stood motionless. He did not hear the threatening noise of the men coming nearer through the forest. He scarcely heard the girl's last words. His mind was groping in sudden darkness, stupefied by the flashing shock that demolished in a second his new world. He groaned, the heart-breaking groan of a strong man, racked with sorrow.

"Dead," he repeated dully. "He is dead. My father is dead. No;" he challenged her, "I not believe it."

"Oh, no, M'sieu," Nini pleaded, alarmed by the words which seemed wild to her. "It was not

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your father. It was M'sieu Huntworth. Please go, M'sieu," she begged again. "They are almost here. For my sake, M'sieu."

"All blood," croaked a tremulous voice. A ghostly little figure stood in the doorway between them and the candle-light. "We lak not de blood, ma violin and I."

"It is true." Deep conviction, thrilled with sadness, was in the artist's vibrant words.

"Please go, M'sieu. If you love me"—

"I love you," said Dan Smith sternly. "I love him, also. Oh," he cried bitterly, his face upturned to the silvery cold heavens, "we are the card in the han' of the fate. They play the game an' they laugh."

"Please go, M'sieu." Nini repeated the entreaty again and again, wringing her hands.

"No, I not go." Dan Smith spoke more quietly. "I wait an' see the en'—of the game."

Lanterns glimmered like glow-worms in the edge of the woods. The murmur had grown into low shouts, growling shouts, like a brewing storm in its advance.

"Have not fear, François," said Dan Smith

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with a dry, merry laugh. "François bon homme, is it not so? A good man fear nothing. The candle on the table there, it beckon to you, ma belle Nini. It is more safe there, yee?"

A crowd of dark shadows, fantastical the flicker of bobbing lanterns, burst from the woods and came scurrying through the wet grass. The spasmodic shouting grew into a wild, steady yell of triumph, as the artist moved jauntily forward to where they could see him past the corner of the cabin. Nini slunk back wretchedly against the sagging door.

"Ugh," Dan Smith shrugged his shoulders. "They soun' not so ver' gentle, those men there. P'raps they mak The Win' to have fear. It is a pity."

Nini saw two stocky figures burst into view. Others swarmed at their heels.

"Bon soir, Messieurs," came Dan Smith's musical voice. "It is —"

The two men, slightly in advance, hurled themselves upon the tall, erect form, and Nini closed her eyes with a low groan. When she opened them again, a dozen figures, half-lit by tossing lantern

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light, hid him from her. She heard the low hum of jabbering voices, grunting, cursing, incoherent with rage. Then one voice stood out in leadership, and Nini held her breath to listen. It was M'sieu Thomas.

"There's a hemlock yonder. We passed it. His horse is tied to it. We'll give him a last ride." The chorus of assent had a grimmer significance to Nini than M'sieu Thomas's words or tone.

She started forward, the numoness of momentary horror leaving her limbs. She must do something, what or how she did not know. With every step she gathered courage, poise, strength of soul that put to shame her trembling day.

The aggressive movements of the hunters, closing about their prey, hesitated and ceased. The group of simple lumbermen, maddened into an unreasoning mob, fell back in astonishment before the slip of a girl who stood unflinching, in their midst, facing Mr. Thomas defiantly.

"He did not do it. I say he did not do it. You do not know. It is not just. It is cruel." The torrent of speech was stopped. Her throat gulped dryly. For a few seconds no one of the glowering

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crowd spoke. The unexpected presence of a woman confused them; her vehemence startled them. At last a man who stood near her thrust his lantern in her face.

"Nini," exclaimed Mr. Thomas, with surprise. He saw, with the others, the closely pressed lips, the frenzy of determination in the girl's face. "What are you doing here?" he demanded coldly.

"I came to warn him," declared the girl, throwing back her head. "I begged him to run away, to escape, but he would not. Oh, M'sieu," she cried, her clear voice breaking as she turned to Dan Smith, who stood behind her, unruffled in spite of the scuffle, and in spite of the ropes that bound his arms. "Why didn't you go? Why didn't you go?"

The artist tried to reach her, but powerful hands restrained him.

"Have not fear, *ma belle* Nini," he called tenderly. "*Eh bien*, but you are a brave girl. But you mus' not mak them afraid," he added sneeringly. "They are so few against me."

One of the men beside him, with an oath, thrust his hand over the artist's mouth. But the taunt

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told. The crowd pushed toward him angrily, threatening to engulf the girl in its vindictive rush. Two shorter figures, which had lagged behind the others, had joined the group while Nini was speaking. And now one of these pressed forward impetuously, and stood beside her, facing the men.

"I think she's right." Young Thomas's voice was all the braver because it trembled slightly. "Why didn't he go when he had a chance?" he asked stubbornly. "I'd have run away if I was guilty, and I'm not a coward." The last words, with the renewed uncertainty of the men, gave him added courage. "I think we ought to give him a chance."

"Yes, give him a chance," came a ringing voice from the edge of the hesitating group. Nini started at the sound of the voice, and involuntarily peered toward it through the dusk. Dan Smith shook his head free from the hand that covered his mouth.

"I am glad to receive my frien' in my li'l' cabin," said the artist, with whimsical lightness. "It is that which I think when they come to me

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with so much — what you say — eagerness. An' see, I not run away when I can. I can not run away now if I wish. It tak not much of your time, my frien'," he argued almost gaily. "P'raps it have much interes'. An' p'raps," he added more slowly, "it is more fair."

As before Dan Smith's words did him no good. Their primitive minds fathomed no subtleties. His very fearlessness was flippancy to them. It outraged them the more. A word from Mr. Thomas would have coalesced them for immediate action. His son's defense made him indecisive, however, and, in the delay, a quick hand caught Dan Smith and marched him toward the door. The others, even the men who had held him, followed slowly, doubtfully, in a herd. The brilliancy of the lanterns lit up the little cabin with increasing light, which shone among the cobwebbed rafters. The fiddler, hiding in a farther corner, crouched backward, gaping terrified about the room. Dan Smith, as he reached the table, looked down at the man who gripped his arm. He started imperceptibly and leaned downward. Instantly the bearded peddler averted his face, and, relinquish-

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ing his grasp, he crept away quickly, losing himself among the men who came tramping sullenly in. Dan Smith's lips parted in a half-smile. Then he faced about, stolid, careless, apparently unimpressed by the somber faces of the little phalanx that stood threateningly between him and the door. Last of all came Mr. Thomas and his son and Nini. The crowd made way for them respectfully. The two men halted, but Nini came on toward the artist. Then, realizing she was alone, she stopped falteringly near the middle of the cabin. Mr. Thomas looked at her suspiciously.

"How do we know," he grumbled, addressing his son, although the words carried to every ear in the room, "that she didn't help him do it. She warned him —"

He went no farther. With a bound Dan Smith, regardless of his bonds, threw himself at him. The force of the attack sent Mr. Thomas sprawling, the artist falling heavily upon him. Half a dozen hands caught Dan Smith simultaneously, and pulled him off. As they did so, Mr. Thomas, raising himself upon one hand, struck him angrily in the face. The artist flung himself loose, with

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panther-like agility, and stood over the older man, his face contorted with rage. Then he shrugged his shoulders under the rope.

"You follow him — *him!*" There was unutterable scorn in the word. He glanced derisively up and down the line of silent men. "He insult a woman. He strike the man with the han' tie'. You follow him! Bah!"

He whirled about and walked back to his place by the table. It was all done in a few seconds, but the effect was electric in its swiftness. Dan Smith, facing the group once more, his teeth set, his heart bitter, realized the almost miraculous change. The sullen faces about him lightened, became more human. Sheer vindictiveness, the unreasoning desire for vengeance passed, and with it the grim, tightly-strung tension which had been ready to break at any second in brutal action. In their hearts these simple men believed in fair play. They would have fought any one who had denied it. They liked strength, daring, fearlessness, honesty, bigness of mind and body and heart. They loved a man. And here, in a flash, was a man.

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"*Bon,*" cried a voice. Nini, dazed at the rapid crisis, started violently. "*Brave homme.*"

Others echoed the words, and stopped, undecided. Mr. Thomas, regaining his feet, felt the difference in the waiting crowd.

"I tell you I know he did it," he declared, shaking an accusing forefinger at the tall, imperturbable figure. "We've told you what he did at the house last night. Then Mr. Huntworth disappeared, God knows what for, and we find him, dead, half way to this man's cabin. It's clear enough, isn't it?"

There was a pause. The group watched Dan Smith, waiting almost anxiously, it seemed, for his defense. But none came.

"Huntworth was your friend and mine," Mr. Thomas broke in. "We didn't do it, did we?"

There was a low, growling murmur of reply, and Dan Smith heard it with a thrill of pride, pride for his father. "Loyal to me." The old man's words repeated themselves in his ears. If he heard, as well, the note of renewed antagonism in their voices he gave no sign. He remained stolid, unanswering.

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The momentary hopefulness had left Nini's face as she waited vainly for him to speak. Beseeching fear, an agony of doubt, came in its place. Young Thomas watched her until he could endure it no longer. He strode forward, between her and Dan Smith.

"You didn't see him again," he asked, "after you left the house, did you?"

Immediately the room was still.

"Yes," said Dan Smith quietly, bowing. "He is here, long time."

There was a breathless second, then unrepressed exclamations of amazement and anger. Young Thomas, his well-meant attempt at defense blocked unexpectedly, stood dumbfounded, not knowing what to do.

"All blood." The croaking, unreal whisper stifled all other sound. "All blood. We lak not de blood —"

The words ended in a shrill shriek as Mr. Thomas seized the little fiddler's collar and dragged him, feebly struggling, into the brighter light.

"You hear that, men," cried Mr. Thomas excitedly, releasing François a foot or two from Dan

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Smith. "Now tell us," he demended. "Tell us what you saw."

The shriveled, white-faced fiddler backed away hugging protectingly the old violin. He blundered against Dan Smith's unmoving form. He looked up and saw the artist's encouraging smile. His watery eyes lost their stare. He laughed idiotically.

"It is nothing," he said. He grimaced placatingly at the somber faces, and drew the worn fiddle from under his arm. "Good moosic, ma violin eh, M'sieu?" He glanced up at Dan Smith.

"*Dansez, Messieurs,*" he called, snuggling the violin under his chin. "We play good moosic."

The circle of men had drawn nearer, closing in about them. François' hand with the bow dropped to his side. He began to tremble.

"François, *bon homme,*" he quavered, retreating close to the artist's side.

"Yes. You are good man, François," said Dan Smith gently. He moved forward a step and the fiddler crouched behind him. "Have no fear."

But Mr. Thomas had forgotten François.

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he stood by the table, his eye had been caught by the blue gleam of steel near the candle. He snatched up the revolver and held it to the light. Then he handed it to his son. The mere sight of the weapon and the ill-concealed triumph of his gesture magnetized the crowd. They edged forward, a cordon of grim, expectant faces, of stocky bodies knit with restrained power. The shuffle of their feet only accentuated the suspense. Young Thomas scrutinized the revolver. Then he looked up, straight into Dan Smith's impenetrable mask. Almost instantly his gaze swerved, miserably, to Nini, who, pushed inward by the narrowing circle, stood at his side. At last he nodded.

"It's his," he said shortly. "It's the one I gave him on the porch."

"There, men," cried Mr. Thomas. There was pride and self-justification as well as victory in his tone. "Do you want anything more?"

A dead pause answered him. Every eye was directed inquiringly at the calm, handsome face of the artist. They waited, against hope, for his explanation. It was more a jury than a mob, their desire for vengeance balanced by the admiration

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he had won from them. At last, three of them stepped forward, almost in the same second, and put their hands upon him. Their grasp was not rough and their eyes did not meet his. The others inclined their heads solemnly. The jury had spoken.

"Oh, Messieurs!" Nini threw herself in front of him and faced the others doggedly, pleadingly. "He saved M'sieu's life twice. M'sieu himself said so."

Sinewy arms, with firm, kindly pressure, drew her to one side. It was settled.

"Oh, M'sieu, tell them you didn't do it," begged the girl. "Tell them —"

"No," interrupted Dan Smith gently. For the first time his mobile features showed suffering, harrowed by her appeal. "I not do it. I am innocent."

"Oh, listen to him, please listen to him." Nini saw the unchanged conviction on the faces about her. "I think I know who did it," she cried desperately. "It was —"

The name was drowned by a loud exclamation from Dan Smith.

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doggedly."

A NEW DAWN

"No, no, Nini," he said, and the room was hushed before the command in his voice. "It is not fair to accuse. We can not know. Be not so sad, li'l' brown girl." His tone became compassionate. "These men here they wish to be right. They are his frien', an' they are my frien' also. P'raps it is bes'. P'raps I deserve to be punish'. Who knows?"

The voice faltered with the last words, and he bowed his head. For a few seconds no one stirred. The rugged men regarded him in perplexed, respectful silence. At last one of them turned away, and the movement broke the spell of his speech, of the man himself, that had lingered. Those about him moved forward, leading him. They had gone but a step, when a clarion voice interrupted, shaking their purpose anew.

"Wait." The peddler stood in the center of the breaking circle. The cringing bend of his back was gone. The squeaking falsetto had disappeared, and his tone was rich and full. He spoke with strange authority, as of one who is accustomed to obedience. His keen eyes were steady.

GLEAM O' DAWN

"I am not what I seem to be. I am a priest."

If the complete transformation of the man had not been behind the words, he would have been brushed aside. As it was, the crowd made way for him indecisively. One or two, however, who stood in the path of his direct gaze, crossed themselves mechanically.

"Pere Baptiste." Nini crept forward, speaking the name almost inaudibly.

"Yes, my daughter, it is Pere Baptiste." He rested his hand upon her brown, bowed head. "Why I came to you as I did is concerned with this girl," he explained simply. "But that cannot matter to you now and here. I have known Mr. Huntworth many years, longer, I think, than any of you," he continued incisively. "I knew this man," he indicated Dan Smith, "when he was a boy. I know much that you do not know." He paused impressively. Then, raising his hand, he went on, solemnly: "And I warn you, as a priest of God —"

A hoarse, gasping cry from the doorway jarred upon the measured tones, scattering reverence and awe with the shock of human agony. The men

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fell back, alarmed, and opened a lane for a hideous, staggering figure, caked and dripping with blood. It lurched toward Dan Smith, one doubled fist thrust above half blinded, glazing eyes, the other clutching the handle of a dull, blood-rusted knife. The crowd drew back panic-stricken, before the bloated, glaring face, the gruesome, unhuman figure, as before a specter. Even Pere Baptiste instinctively retreated, and the men at the artist's side dropped their hands from his arms.

"Red Feather." The Indian stopped, swaying drunkenly, his shaking arms outstretched, in front of Dan Smith. The rent, dying body seemed to gather itself for a final effort. The upraised hand beat upon the matted hair as if to steady the reeling brain. "I — kill — him." The triumphant words rasped and rattled in his throat. "We fight — fair."

Not a muscle moved in Dan Smith's stern countenance. He, alone, had not wavered from his place. He said nothing. The Indian bent gropingly toward him, leering. Hate twisted the mumbling mouth, and sprang to the protruding lips in a fiendish snarl.

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"You — you — tell him — me go." The shattered hulk tottered, but the hand with the knife jerked upward. "You — not — keep — promise."

Dan Smith did not give way. His breast seemed to swell up, beneath the rope, to meet the blow. But before Nini, who, quicker than any of the men, darted forward, could seize the lifted arm, the knife fell clanging, to the floor.

"Gleam o' Dawn," came the thick whisper as the Indian peered at the calm face before him. He tumbled to his knees, and then strained upward again, shakingly, as if some mighty force pressed him down. He caught Dan Smith's shoulder, and swung about, swaying, until he faced the door. He saw the morning light, which had come unnoticed by the group within, and which lay across the threshold in a mellow beam. His blank, leathery, blood-crustured features warmed in a superstitious, mystical smile. His hands stretched out to the light and he started toward it desperately, staggering blindly, his eyes glazed and bulging, his jaw hanging. Half way he reeled and fell, thuddingly. He jerked himself up, shuddering, to his knees, and crept forward, his dying breath

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coming in noisy gusts. His clutching hand caught at the light, and he dragged himself forward by slow inches until the gleam of it was upon his upturned face.

"Gleam o' Dawn."

The body collapsed and dropped, lifeless, across the doorway. In the awed silence, they could hear outside the shrill chirping of the birds, now that the hush of the dawn was passed.

CHAPTER XI

"WHILE WE LIVE"

PRESENCE of mind returned to Pere Baptiste first of all. He stooped forward, picked up the blood-dimmed knife, and, with sure, rapid strokes, severed the ropes that bound Dan Smith. The room began to breathe again, and there came incoherent ejaculations as if the breath stirred sounds, half-formed moments before, in the thrall'd throats. A few of the men bent over the prostrate body in the doorway, and spoke to each other, noddingly, in short, inaudible sentences. Dan Smith changed the position of his cramped arms, but there was no joy evident in his freedom. Inevitable reaction relaxed his nerves and muscles. The tall body sagged with fatigue. Otherwise he remained as he was until Nini, whose uncontrolled sobbing broke the mute stillness, came falteringly to him. Then he put one arm shieldingly about her, stroking her arm soothingly.

"WHILE WE LIVE"

"Who are you, anyhow?" Mr. Thomas, his anger and spite unappeased, asked the question. His tone was superior, suspicious, unsatisfied.

Dan Smith straightened and faced him austere.

"Who I am, what I am, it does not matter — to you," he said evenly.

Mr. Thomas's eyes flinched before his cool, steadfast gaze. Before he could speak again, his son walked determinedly to the artist, and held out his hand.

"I don't care who you are," said Young Thomas, boyish in his enthusiasm, manly in a new decisiveness. "You've been square. You've —" he hesitated, confused but resolute.—"Well, I like you and I'll stand by you, and — I'm glad," he stopped abruptly, his face flushed, glancing at Nini.

Dan Smith seized the outstretched hand. His narrowed, kindly eyes read in the radiant face before him much that the boy had not said. And Young Thomas knew from that look, and from the firm, friendly grasp that enveloped his hand, how clearly he was understood. Then Nini's hands

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slipped from her face, and she smiled at him. And as long as he lives, I believe, Young Thomas will never forget that smile. It has gilded the real love that came to him not long ago. "To comprehend all and to forgive all." Perhaps, after all, that is love.

"*Merci*, my frien'," said Dan Smith simply. Then he looked away to meet the low chorus of approval that had followed spontaneously Young Thomas's words. "But me, I cannot be glad." His blue eyes grew wistful, and his voice broke with feeling. "I learn to love him, my frien', an' see, he is go away. I see him again never. Oh, he is good man, my frien', the bes' man." The vibrant tones thrilled the simple hearts of those who listened, and more than one of the big, rugged lumbermen turned away ashamed, to hide unaccustomed moisture that dimmed their sight. "You know him long time. I, an hour, p'raps two, that is all. I, who miss him all the year. Ah, it is wicked!" He breathed in deeply. "But," he went on, more quietly, after a moment's pause, "we mus' be fair. The Indian there, he do that which he think is right. The fate they

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will. There is a reason. P'raps it is bes'. We cannot know." He saw the frowns, the knit brows, that accompanied the words. "You bury him, my frien'?" It was half appeal, half command.

There was a moment of vacillation. Then Young Thomas went to the door. The others followed, doubtful but silently obeying the mastery of the artist's voice, of his sincerity, of his unyielding gaze. They scarcely noticed Mr. Thomas, as he flung himself past them. Slowly, bearing their ghastly burden, they filed out.

"It is done," Dan Smith said softly, as the sound of their footsteps and of their low voices grew indistinct. He drew Nini closer, and leaning, he kissed her hair fondly. "Li'l' brown girl," he murmured caressingly. "You are all that remain. But it is much, all the worl' an' more. You come to me from him. You fill the heart that is empty for him. You stay with me, li'l' brown girl, alway?" The question was an entreaty.

Nini raised her head and in her tearful, glorified look, she gave herself to him wholly, forever. With a low moan of joy he half-stooped, half drew her up to him. Their lips clung, pressing closer,

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whiter in an agony of giving. It was deeper than passion. Their very souls, chastened by suffering, awakened to that eternal love that passes all understanding, breathed together. With a soft sigh of supreme content Dan Smith drew back at last, nestling the brown head against his bare neck. A smile of infinite compassion, of almost divine happiness illuminated his face as he looked up, straight into the keen, watching eyes of the peddler-priest. Their scrutiny became more intense as the artist's surprised glance met them, as if they were trying to fathom all the inward depths of the man. But Dan Smith's face was frank and open, concealing nothing.

"Pardon, my frien'," he said, with genial dignity. "We forget you, an' it is not jus'. We owe you much. I owe you much long time."

"I am used to being forgotten," replied the other dryly. "I am only amazed when some one remembers me, my son, as you remembered me last night."

Nini hung more heavily upon Dan Smith's arm, creeping still closer to him. The memory of long years of strict rule, of unquestioning obedience,

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came with the priest's voice. The habit of childhood persisted, and for the moment she trembled at the thought that he might take her away from her wonderful happiness, from Dan Smith. She watched him apprehensively.

"It is a strange worl'," Dan Smith answered slowly. He felt the tremor of her clinging body, and his arm tightened about her. "We are lak the twig that float on the stream. We meet. Then the water it suck us away, an' then by 'n' bye we drift together again. Why?" He shrugged his shoulders. "Who knows?"

The pressure of his arm, the easy confidence of his speech gave Nini new courage. She was no longer a child. She was a woman, capable of choice, of decision.

"But, Pere Baptiste, why did you come so?" she asked. "I did not know you with the ugly beard."

The priest gazed at her earnestly. Her eyes did not waver. He felt a certain aloofness in the girl, and he winced before it.

"It was part play, my daughter," he said at last, gravely. "But that was not all. I wished

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to see you as you lived day by day, to watch you, unseen, to know that you were contented, that you were growing as you should grow, that—" He hesitated. "I was lonely for you, Nini. I missed you. I wrote that I was going away—that was to help my poor disguise,—and then I came to see you. I wished not even you to guess it, nor him. I had given you up. I did not wish to confess my weakness. It was foolish. He would have understood."

Dan Smith's eyes had contracted thoughtfully. He felt the undercurrent of emotion beneath the smooth surface of the priest's level speech. His mind grasped for the first time the double tie by which Pere Baptiste was bound to their past.

"It is strange," he said. He glanced down at Nini, but he was baffled. He could see only an edge of brow and cheek. She was still watching Pere Baptiste. "My li'l' brown girl," he went on, returning to the priest. His manner accentuated the word of possession, of ownership. "She live with you long time. Often I think the worl' is beeg, but it is not so. It is a li'l' worl', *tres petite*."

"WHILE WE LIVE"

Opposition, that was almost jealousy, flamed in the priest's look. He came forward a step.

"By what right, my son," he demanded severely, "do you call her yours?"

"By the right of love, my frien'." Dan Smith met the challenge with equal sternness. "See," he went on, with sudden, boyish enthusiasm, "you are a pries'. You can marry us, now, here. Is it not so, my Nini?"

Still Nini's face was averted. She did not answer. She was gazing at Pere Baptiste, who shrank back before the artist's suggestion as before a blow.

Dan Smith looked up at him, frowning, uncomprehending.

"Did Mr. Huntworth know?" Pere Baptiste asked, after a dull pause. "Did you tell him that you loved — Nini?"

"Yes, my frien'." The artist's flexible face was sober at the mention of his father. "He say there is something, I know not what, that he mus' tell me. Then he say, 'If you love her, marry her. If you marry her, love her.' They are his word, my frien'. That is all."

GLEAM O' DAWN

The priest's eyes fell before his gaze. He appeared to recoil. His head was bowed as if in prayer, and his white hands clasped nervously.

"Each must suffer for the wrong he has done." The intoned words were thrilled with sorrow. "None can escape. And I, a priest, least of all. Often we spoke of it, he and I. He is dead. It is an easier way than mine." He paused. "These two — how inscrutable are Thy ways, O God."

The man and the girl stood spell-bound. At last Pere Baptiste stood erect and faced them.

"I am a priest." He forced himself to speak deliberately, sonorously. "A priest can not marry. You — you are my child, Nini." He closed his eyes, shutting out the look of Nini's altered, staring face, and, looking upward, he went on rapidly: "And may God, Who is the Father of us all, grant us His divine absolution."

An interval of blank silence succeeded the pitiful invocation, but the strange truth echoed loudly in two hearts that beat again, now that the spell was broken. Nini pressed forward.

"My mother?" she whispered.

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"Do not ask me, my daughter," came the broken answer.

The girl did not move for a few seconds. Then she twisted herself about in Dan Smith's arms, and looked up at him, her face spiritualized by love and trust.

"Do you love me, M'sieu?" she asked quietly.

Dan Smith drew her closer to him. The benign glory in her eyes was reflected by the gladder light in his.

"I love you," he cried, and he kissed her calm lips.

"Listen, Nini," commanded Pere Baptiste rigorously. "You have not heard all. There must be nothing held back, no subterfuge. He is half Indian. Mr. Huntworth was his father. It was that," added the priest, "which, Heaven help us, brought us together."

Dan Smith's solemn acquiescence answered the girl's questioning glance.

"The Indian girl in the picture?" Nini asked, forgetting the priest.

"She was my mother."

GLEAM O' DAWN

Smiling, she put her arms about his neck and drew his lips down to hers.

"I love you," she whispered. Her hands slipped to his cheeks, and held his face away from her. Her soul was in her loving eyes, in her loving smile. "It is all very wonderful, M'sieu," she said, and her voice was a caress. "I do not understand and I do not care. I love you. I know that you love me. And that is the most wonderful thing of all."

"Li'l' brown girl." Dan Smith tore down the barriers of her arms. They seemed to leap together, these two waifs of the world, in such a heaven of sweet joy as the world itself seldom knows. "Li'l' brown girl —" "Oh, M'sieu."

Some moments later, Pere Baptiste touched Dan Smith's shoulder.

"Have you a Bible?" he asked.

The artist, releasing the girl for a moment, brought the worn book from the table. Pere Baptiste opened it, and looked up at Dan Smith in surprise.

"You have kept it?"

"Yes, my frien'."

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There was pleasure and satisfaction in the priest's scrutiny.

"It is fitting," he said simply.

They stood before him, as he read in soft monotone. Their hands and their hearts were clasped before him. They were one before he spoke, one in spirit and in truth; but the bond which men, in their worship, had ordained, united these two with a peculiar peace. They bowed their heads beneath the priest's hands, extended in benediction, and a benediction, deeper than his trembling words, descended upon them.

They turned away and, in reverent silence, they walked hand in hand to the door. Pere Baptiste remained by the table watching them. As Dan Smith stood upon the threshold, a wizened figure crept from the shadow of the farther corner. It scurried fearfully past the priest and plucked with thin fingers at Dan Smith's arm.

"De last time, M'sieu?"

"François," said the artist, looking over his shoulder. "Yes, the las' time, François. Come, Nini," he said quietly, circling her with his arm.

"We go — to him."

GLEAM O' DAWN

But Nini held back. She turned to Pere Baptiste.

"You will come?" she asked. It was the first time she had not uttered his name.

"Yes, my daughter," he replied and followed them.

Dan Smith's face was toward the cloudless, glowing east.

"He is dead," he said softly. "What is the death? Who knows?" He drew her strongly to him, gazing fiercely, lovingly into her eyes. "But while we live, Nini —"

Her hands were on his shoulders, and the light of a new day glorified her face.

"While we live, M'sieu."

THE END

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